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THE TOWERS of ST. NICHOLAS



MARY · AGATHA · GRAY

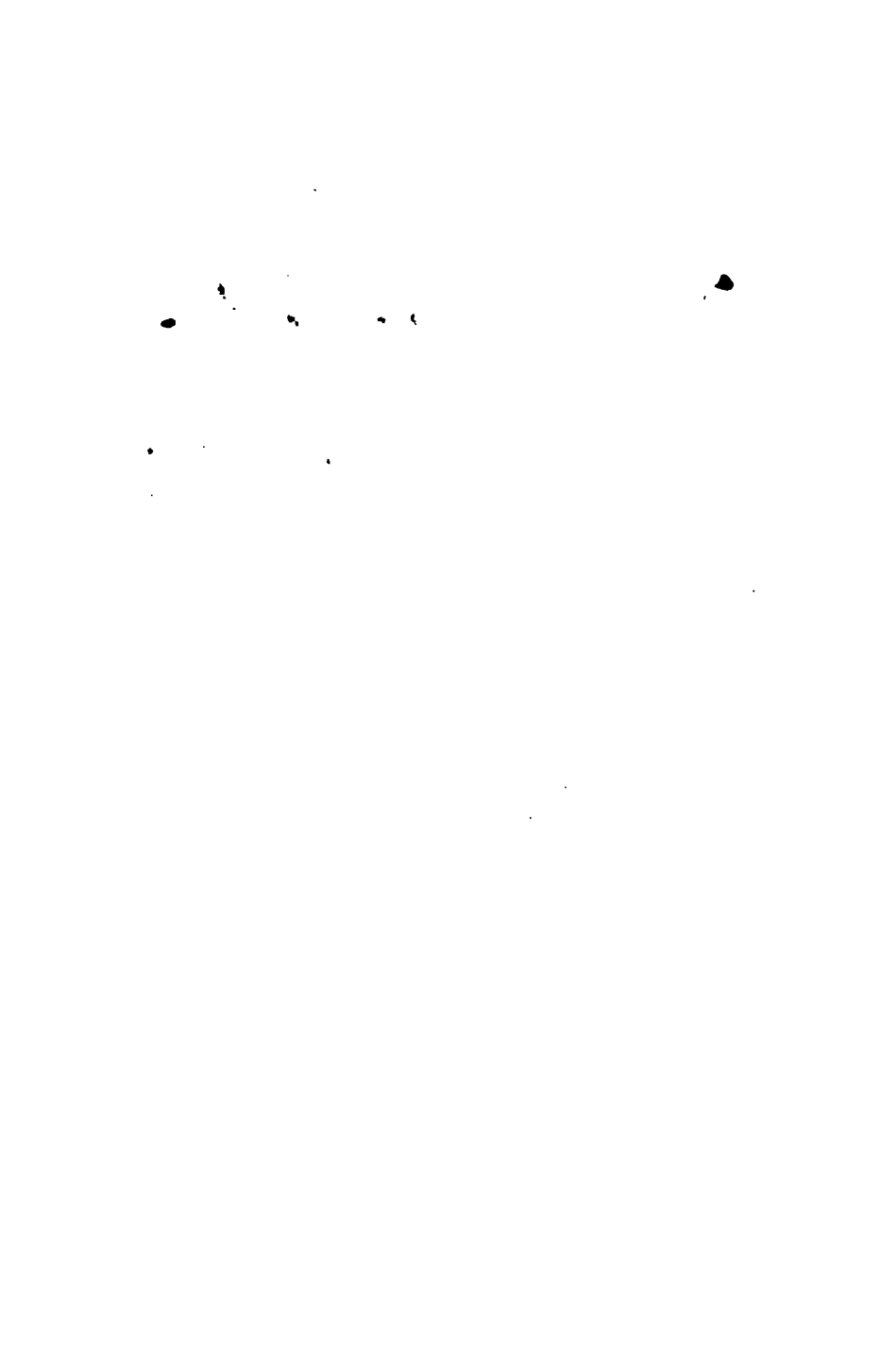
1. Fiction, English





To my dear sister
Christmas 1913.

K. L. H.
Gr. 24



THE TOWERS OF ST. NICHOLAS

A STORY OF THE DAYS OF
"GOOD QUEEN BESS"

BY

MARY AGATHA GRAY

AUTHOR OF

"The Turn of the Tide," "The Tempest of the Heart," etc.

L.S.

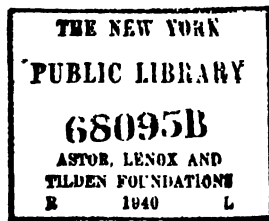
P. J. KENEDY & SONS

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FOREWORD

THIS story, based on the historical events of the reign of "Good Queen Bess," is intended to be one of a series which aims at representing the real spirit of our Catholic Ancestors at various periods, and their attitude toward the events of their day.

Current literature is frequently faulty in this matter. Prejudice has been too strong not to die hard. Hence it often happens that an otherwise well-meaning writer contrives to impart a turn that results in caricature either to his narrative or to his portrayal of certain characters.

To us, who are their children, the clearing of their memories from these calumnies should be a solemn duty. They passed through many tribulations to their eternal rest: it should be our delight to follow their footsteps in the way that led them thither, and our glory to honor them. Their name is legion, for not only those few whose names are inscribed in the martyrology of the Church, or written large in the history of their country, were sufferers for their Faith—for *our* Faith—but countless others, men, women, even little children, passed, suffering and untimely, from an evil world to their Father's home in Heaven.

The Towers of St. Nicholas really exist at the present day and many readers will readily identify the crumbling ruins on the verge of the cliffs. With this exception the tale does not claim to be historical, for its main characters are wholly fictitious, yet they are types of the sturdy Catholics who stood firm; or of the weak ones who went under in those days when there was a great winnowing.

In conclusion, it has been suggested to me that it would be as well to draw attention to the fact that "The Towers of St. Nicholas" was written, and in part published (as a serial in the "Sunday Companion") before Mgr. Benson's novel, "Come Rack! Come Rope!" appeared. This statement seems advisable on account of certain apparent similarities that might make "The Towers of St. Nicholas" appear to have been inspired by the great author's work.

MARY AGATHA GRAY.

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THE TOWERS OF ST. NICHOLAS

CHAPTER I.

ETHENDENE.

EVEN at that time, the twentieth year of the reign of "Good Queen Bess," Ethendene was an ancient house. For long centuries, even before the advent of the Vikings and the Norman conquerors, there had been a Franklin at Ethendene to chase the stag in its broad acres or fish in the stream that bounded the estate to the northward. On the east the tall white cliffs stood sentinel against the sea that broke and foamed over the sunken rocks below them, and on the west the broad lands of Ethendene were bordered by a track of swampy forest that none save the initiated could pass in safety, so that on all sides, save to the southward, the Franklins needed but little or no guard and on this side too lay a tract of barren land, part swamp, part thick forest, part bleak downs with

a perilous and rugged coastline where they joined the eastern boundary of Ethendene Park.

Perhaps it was the natural defences of the place that had enabled the Franklins of Ethendene to hold their own through the stormy years that had followed on the Danish and Norman invasions, and, some centuries later, through the stress and strife of civil war. However that may be, through all those long years they had held their own and the Franklins of Ethendene still held sway in homely fashion amongst their own people.

The house was low and square built of roughly-quarried grey stone; the low pitched roof of red tiles shone through the tangle of green ivy that had climbed to the chimney tops. Here and there deeply set windows peered forth half fearfully. They were the eyes of the house designed more for use and defence than for ornament and though they boasted casements of glass these were of recent addition. The whole effect was one of strength and safety rather than of wealth and display.

On this May morning two ladies sat in the great hall. The elder, a tall, sweet-faced, stately woman of some fifty years of age, was dressed in the sombre garb of widowhood. Her black velvet cap with its pendant veil almost entirely concealed her silver hair. A small stiff ruff encircled her neck and the long pointed bodice of her gown was wrought in tarnished silver, while a cord girdle of the same metal encircled her waist and hung almost to her feet. She wore no other ornaments, if we except a signet ring of gold engraved with

a Crusader's cross, an heirloom in the family which she had taken from the hand of her dead husband less than a year before.

The younger lady was only a girl with grey steadfast eyes, and red-gold hair made the more striking by the mourning robes she also wore. She rose somewhat abruptly and went to the window. From the open casement she could see the green park that stretched away from the house to the hollow between the hills where the little river ran on its way to the sea.. All nature was joyous on this fair spring morning. The warm sunbeams kissed the blossoming hawthorns and the lilacs and laburnums that swayed to the soft breezes, drawing thence a wealth of perfumes. The river gurgled merrily over its sandy bed; even the distant roar of surf at the foot of the cliffs was subdued to a faint undertone that breathed happiness. The girl smiled wanly—then she sighed—her memories were sorrowful and the sorrow still too recent to bear the contrast with the joyous day.

"Etheldreda!"

She turned at the sound. The widow was busily engaged in the preparation of flax for spinning.

"Mother!" She had withdrawn from the window. There was a question, a note almost of terror in her voice.

"Nay, dearest, I but wished to hear your voice. I would that Harold were safely here."

The girl glanced uneasily around. "Hush, dearest," she almost whispered then aloud, "Master Thompson will be here at sundown; all goes well. And now I pray you rest, Mother, for your face is

pale and your hands tremble. See! let me take the distaff from you and lead you to your couch." She threw herself impulsively on her knees at Dame Franklin's side. The mother passed her hand fondly over the girl's face, touching each feature gently and caressingly. It is thus that the blind 'look' upon the faces of their beloved ones. The girl remained passive while the tender scrutiny proceeded; it ended at last and the widow leaned back in the deep carved chair a little wearily.

"Come, Mother, rest you," she coaxed again.

"Nay, dearest—'tis but little of rest would come to me. 'Twere better far to purchase patience by industry; a little work would ease me more than rest, Etheldreda, for indeed anxiety is but a poor pillow for an old blind woman." She smiled brightly as she spoke. The girl's eyes filled with tears. Had her mother broken out into complaints, had she striven against fate, against the machinations of evil men, against her blindness, her widowhood—her daughter had found it easier to bear. At times this sweet serenity irritated the girl. Surely the days were evil, it might be that worse were to follow, and it seemed tame spirited to her to sit quiet and still and smile at desolation and suffering—and death!

'Twas not a year yet since Master Franklin had died—been done to death—by the knavery of his own brother after the fashion of the times. Cedric Franklin had chosen to fling aside his allegiance to the Faith of his Fathers and to conform to the new worship ordained by the imperious daughter of Henry VIII. To add to his infamy

he had denounced his brother as a "recusant"* and his brother's son and heir, for that he had gone beyond the seas and there been ordained priest. As the price of his threefold treachery he had demanded his legal right—the possession of his late brother's estate—and Elizabeth had graciously allowed his claim while, truth to tell, she heartily despised the man who had been willing to serve as her tool for the accomplishment of her purpose. But the wily queen carefully abstained from the expression of her scorn, and Cedric Franklin had gone forth from her presence bravely, as became one of her courtiers; yet there were others better versed in the ways of that strange court who laughed easily and scornfully too, when the traitor had fairly started along the road that led to Ethendene. It was not their affair certainly; they would most likely have done the same had the opportunity offered; nevertheless they scorned the man who had stooped so low as Cedric Franklin.

It was small wonder that Etheldreda found it a hard matter to forgive her uncle, that sometimes the pain at her heart made her cry out against the injustice of man. She was but young and in her veins ran a strain of Norse blood derived from a warlike Viking ancestor.

The sound of approaching horsemen broke upon their silence. It was still early in the afternoon and the expected traveller could hardly yet have arrived. Etheldreda sprang to her feet, the

*The term employed by the Protestants to describe Catholics.

widow raised her head to listen, for a moment neither spoke, then Dame Franklin rose:

"'Tis Harold!" she exclaimed joyfully, clasping her hands nervously together.

"Hush, Mother! do not speak until we are sure. Methinks these men are scarce like to be my brother's way-comrades. 'Tis more like to be mine uncle come to take possession of Ethendene."

"Now, God forbid! Go and see who comes, Etheldreda," she said anxiously and sank back weakly into her chair with her hands laid passively in her lap. Now that the moment had come, Patience stood waiting at her side. For years she had schooled herself to suffer and to wait, and now Patience came at her call to ease her pain and soothe her anxiety, yet the gladness of the day had departed.

Less than a year ago she had looked, with failing eyes, upon the dead face of her husband and striven to be thankful for his glorious death. Since then her sight had wholly failed her, but in the darkness she had clung to the hand of God and it had not been all loss, for with the failure of her bodily sight had come the clearing of her spirit's vision till she had come to live almost more in Heaven than upon earth.

Etheldreda guessed something of all this but she could not understand it. Her Viking blood rebelled and though she strove to forgive it was not with a full measure of success. She felt that she might have forgiven her own wrongs—but there was her blind mother who had already suffered so much of agony and anxiety, and her

brother, the young priest, who was compelled to exercise his functions in peril of his life, and the injury to Holy Church that her uncle's apostacy had wrought. All these rankled and burned and as yet she had not patience. But she had scant time for meditation just then. Cedric Franklin was approaching rapidly at the head of a troop of retainers, and the priest was due to arrive at sundown.

When she summoned resolution to go to the door her uncle had already dismounted. He looked at her sharply and an expression of displeasure settled on his brow as he noted her silence and her mourning garb.

"How now, Etheldreda!" he exclaimed as he gave his horse to the care of one of his followers—"no greeting for your uncle?"

She swept him a courtesy. "Good morrow, Uncle," she said quietly, "I am fain to welcome you myself, seeing that my mother cannot come to do you worship. Of late her sight hath failed her and I beg you, of your courtesy to come to her."

Etheldreda was more than common tall and her eyes met her uncle's squarely. There was a hint of defiance too in their steady gaze that brought a flush to the fair cheek of Cedric Franklin. For a moment he faltered, there was a hint of uncertainty in his carriage, then he turned to one of his followers:

"See to it that the men have refreshment," he said, "and care for the horses. We have ridden far to-day," he added, half apologetically to his niece.

"Pray you enter, Uncle," she replied smothering her resentment, and he went forward to where Dame Franklin sat in her widow's weeds in the chair of state. For a moment he hesitated, but his eye caught the girl's and her steady look confirmed him in his purpose.

"I give you greeting, Sister," he said, bending over the hand she extended to him, the hand that bore the signet of the Franklins. He noted its gleam and scowled even while she greeted him to Ethendene.

"You are come to stay with us, perchance?" she said bravely, feeling that it would be better if he told his errand plainly and done with it.

"Ay!" he said gruffly. "The Queen's Grace hath granted to us the house and lands of our sometime brother lately attainted of High Treason, who died in——"

"Nay—who died a martyr for the Ancient Faith," interrupted the widow.

For a moment the man paused, a little doubtful how to proceed.

"Nay, I meant not to be harsh," he said, "but, my good sister, you are better guarded so—having no heir—and the estates being forfeited in any case to the Queen's Grace. While I am Lord of Ethendene you shall not need a home nor the furnishings that suit with your state and infirmity. As for my niece, she be young and comely; I trow she'll soon find a mate amongst the neighboring gentry. But see to it, Niece, that he be such an one as may find favor with Her Grace, for

indeed if you anger her I might find it a hard matter to win your pardon."

"I thank you, Uncle," broke in Etheldreda impetuously, "I look not to wed while my mother needs me, and if I wed I look to choose my mate for myself."

"Softly, my child," spoke the widow mildly. Then, to The Franklin, "I pray you, Cedric, to pardon the child. Indeed she hath more than her fair share of Franklin courage that brooks no interference. She is somewhat too young also for marriage, and I greatly need her now for I am quite blind."

She said it quietly, not repiningly, scarcely even sadly. The man started.

"Nay, and is it so? I had heard that your sight was failing and deemed it but the tax of Time on advancing years. And you be blind indeed, may the Fates pity you!" She smiled, and he wondered how she could be so bright.

"Nay, Cedric, God knows I be poor and weak and helpless—therefore is He the more surely my helper and defender." The man scowled, he liked not the tenor of Dame Franklin's discourse.

"Nay!" he exclaimed impatiently, "have I not said that I would be your defender, saving of course that you do naught to anger the Queen's Grace."

"The Queen's Grace be not like to notice an old blind woman and her young daughter, Cedric."

"I be none so sure of that, Gertrude, seeing that her attention hath already been drawn to them." He stopped suddenly, for there was a sound of

singing without, a wild weird song in a high treble voice.

"The Raven croaks in the old oak tree,
And the corpse's chains clank merrily,
Little the dead man recks of care,
His soul has passed, and broke the snare."

The widow's hand shook a little and her face blanched, for Cedric Franklin had turned hastily toward the sound. Etheldreda listened for a moment:

"'Tis old Tirzah!" she exclaimed and her mother caught a tone of relief in her voice, "no one minds her, Uncle. 'Tis an old gypsy woman who brings herbs and simples for medicine."

Cedric turned sharply to his niece:

"Then see to it that she comes no more," he said shortly, "I like not these wandering folk. They come like crows who scent carrions and carry news from door to door. Belike she hath heard or seen my arrival and seeks to make profit by it."

Etheldreda hastened away in silence while Cedric stood with folded arms looking after her. He foresaw opposition from his niece and he was resolved to crush her spirit forthwith.

For a moment silence reigned in the hall. Dame Franklin was the first to speak:

"Pray you be gentle with Etheldreda, Cedric, she hath a loving heart but a stern will, albeit she is but a child still, with some of a child's waywardness and all of its innocence."

"So, Gertrude, you have reared a weakling. Methought you should have known better. In these times maids, as well as men, need to be made of stern stuff. I may not always be at hand to defend the girl and yet you are scarcely a strong guardian for her either."

There were sounds of hurried coming and going, as though an arrival took place. Dame Franklin paled a little but she sat calmly on, save for the little play of her fingers with the tassels of her girdle. Then the voice of Tirzah, the gypsy, rose once more in a sort of mocking song:

"The foe is come and the friend is gone,
Lone is the hearth and dim,
The dead are dead and gone to God,
The hare he rests 'neath the grassy sod,
By the ocean grey and grim.

Then away to the woods, my gypsies all!
Or away to the foaming waves,
If the stream's sweet waters fail us, there
Are always the ocean's caves,
And the robber a lonely grave shall find
'Neath the angry roaring waves."

Dame Franklin looked up, as though she listened for the coming of someone. There was an expression of relief on her face:

"'Tis a strange creature," she said, half mus-
ingly, "yet a harmless, poor woman. She be more
apt to do a kindness than an injury for all her
threats."

"Nevertheless, I like her not, good Sister, and

though her song be of no meaning, I like it not either. She shall not so offend again else I will have her whipped from the park."

"Cedric! beware how you use your power. Yon gypsy is but a woman, yet she hath a tribe at her back who will most surely exact vengeance for any wrong done to her. Besides, the woman hath done no harm and she be useful to me."

The Franklin scowled again and strode to the window. Etheldreda stood without in the courtyard in earnest converse with the gypsy and a stranger who had apparently but just come upon the scene.

CHAPTER II.

MASTER THOMPSON COMES TO ETHENDENE.

ETHELDREDA stood for a moment with her hand raised to her eyes to shelter them from the slanting rays of the declining sun. They lay in a golden glory on the lilacs and laburnums that were massed at the left side of the house and touched the old roof lovingly until the red tiles that peered forth here and there from amidst the green ivy gleamed like rubies.

But Etheldreda saw nothing of the sunset nor its glory, her heart was beating too quickly and her mind too busy with the problem of the hour, for the stranger who stood speaking with Tirzah was none other than the expected guest, Master Thompson, otherwise, Father Harold Franklin, the hunted priest. He was dressed in the ordinary costume of the period, only in black, which was not much affected even by the men of his day, and might have passed for a country gentleman or a yeoman farmer of the wealthier kind.

The girl was conscious of her uncle's eyes watching all that passed, perhaps suspecting the priest under the guise of the traveller. Danger was nothing new to her and she was a Franklin—she went forward.

"Good morrow, Master Thompson, I give you greeting!" she said, not extending her hand because of Cedric watching at the window. Then lowering her voice: "I pray you to depart without entering the house. Uncle Cedric hath already taken possession by the Queen's permission. He be master here—and we, his guests on sufferance," she added bitterly.

"And Mo—the Lady Gertrude, how fares she, Mistress Etheldreda? Her sight——?"

"Nay—ask me no more now. Our mother sits within and awaits my return. I give you farewell—Go with Tirzah, she will contrive to arrange a meeting for us anon."

"Nay, sweet Sister mine, I am come a long way and a difficult to comfort my mother. I pray you to suffer me to pay her my respects at the least. You were wont to be skilful in the weaving of plots. Think—" he urged, "think of one now."

Tirzah broke in suddenly—she had seen a movement of impatience from the man at the window—

"Come away, Master—you'll come with me since Mistress Franklin will have it so. Ah! Mistress Etheldreda, 'tis an ill thing to have a nephew that roams too far afield. Look at him, and his airs and his fine clothes! Come, Thomas! the lady tires of you." She half pushed, half led the astonished priest to the outer gate. A boy opened it for them to pass out; he looked curiously at the stranger; for the gypsy woman he had a feeling of contempt, but Etheldreda's presence prevented its utterance.

The girl looked after them for a moment, she was conscious of a desire to relax—to weep—but there were other dangers yet to be faced—she had her uncle to meet again. For a moment she raised her eyes to the open casement. Cedric still stood there apparently lost in thought. Etheldreda recoiled for a moment,—she had seen an expression of terror in the man's fixed gaze and great beads of sweat on his forehead. She wondered if by chance he had recognized his nephew. With a prayer in her heart for the safety of the priest and a tightening of her lips she passed under the massive stone archway that gave access to the Hall.

Dame Franklin was still seated in her chair of state. She appeared calm but her hands rested limply on its carved arms and she leaned heavily against the high back. She stirred a little and turned her sightless eyes to the door as Etheldreda entered and passed swiftly to her side.

"Come, Mother! you are tired out. Mine Uncle will excuse you if you retire to your chamber. Tirzah has gone," she said under her breath. The Dame looked relieved.

"Bid her not come here again, Etheldreda, since the Franklin wills it not." She sighed a little as she spoke the title of the head of the house, who should have been her son. Cedric came forward again:

"Ay, go rest you, Sister. The day declines; we have ridden far and my men are weary—we would fain rest us also. Trust to me and all will be well," he added. Etheldreda looked up

suddenly and caught his eye. An expression of bewilderment stole into hers; it was as though the Franklin bade them be at ease about the priest his nephew. Then she remembered her father and the manner of his death, and her brother and the fashion of his coming to the house of their father's, and she stiffened once more.

"I give you good-night, Uncle Cedric!" she said as she led the Dame to her chamber.

Cedric paced slowly back and forth. The departure of his niece and sister-in-law was an immense relief, but his conscience was stirred. He had not recognized the priest and yet something whispered to him that the stranger whom the gypsy woman had dubbed 'Nephew' and hurried so unceremoniously from the scene was no other than the son of his murdered brother, the rightful owner of Ethendene. After all, he argued with himself, there was not so much of harm done. Father Franklin could never have owned the place and he was the best protection for two lone women, being their next of kin. But he dreaded the girl's spirit, should it be necessary for his own safety to cross swords openly with her. His reverie became wearisome at last and he called for supper and lights.

For a little while the great hall resounded with the clatter of knives as the hungry men fell to work on the substantial viands placed before them and did ample justice to Dame Franklin's home-made wines. Then, one by one, they rolled themselves in their cloaks and lay down to rest among

the rushes that were spread thickly over the floor of the hall.

When the moon rose it shone down on Ethendene as it had done through the long centuries since the Franklins had made their home there; it was all still and peaceful; men slept while the watch dog roamed about the silent house and whined for loneliness from time to time.

Etheldreda had thrown herself all dressed upon her couch. Through the open door of the Dame's room she could see her mother's form as she lay calmly sleeping. For two or three hours the girl lay with wide open eyes staring at the network that the moonlight, shining through the lattice, made on the walls of her room. She raised herself on her elbow once, for the dog had given a little joyful whine and she listened intently. There was no sound that she could distinguish and yet she realized the presence of someone without.

She held her breath for a moment or two, then something flew in at the window, passed her and fell to the ground beside her bed. Still there was no sound from without. She waited a few seconds again, then rose and groped for the package and hastily untied it and found a flat white chalk stone wrapped in a piece of cloth. It was a message. She went cautiously to the lattice and looked at it in the moonlight. With some difficulty she made out a cross that was roughly scratched upon the stone, and two letters: H. F.

For a little while longer she hesitated, fearing some trap, then she looked at the Dame who was

sleeping. The house was silent save for an occasional snore from one of her uncle's men below in the hall. Her desire to meet her brother overcame her caution at last and she wrapped herself in a long dark mantle with a hood that might serve to completely conceal her features. For some moments she knelt in earnest prayer for protection in the adventure, then she slipped noiselessly from the room and down the long stone passage that overlooked the hall to the back staircase.

After that it was an easy task to let herself out at the back door that gave access to the kitchens, for she had brought the keys with her from Dame Franklin's room, where they lay on a table beside her bed. The dog tried to follow her but she would not let him come with her beyond the door. He whined once and licked her hand, looking up into her face pleadingly, but lay down silently when she bade him.

The turning of the heavy key gave her a moment of suspense; the rusty old lock groaned and squeaked until she thought that her uncle and all his men must surely hear her and come upon her. It seemed an age before it yielded and then she paused again to listen. There was no sound in the house and she slipped out closing the door behind her carefully, but not locking it for greater ease in returning.

The park lay before her bathed in the soft radiance of the moonlight. The breeze came to her laden with the perfume of hawthorn and lilac,

but she had no thought of them just then. It was only in after years, when memory had lost some of its poignancy, that she realized the glory of that night in Ethendene. The hooting of an owl drew her attention to the deep shadow of the shrubbery and a slight movement, as of a person concealed there, startled her for a moment. She remembered that her uncle was sleeping—and his men—and crossed the narrow lighted space quickly, drawing her hood well forward to conceal her features. It was but a moment and then she stood beside a tall waiting figure wrapped in a heavy cloak.

"Etheldreda!" he whispered as he drew the girl gently to him, "God bless and keep you, dear Sister. Come with me now, I will explain anon. Tirzah wished to bring you to me but I would not allow her. But now, silence, for we have a good way to go and it is better to be wary than sorry, and mother needs you greatly, so no harm must come to you."

She made no answer in words, only pressed his hand gently and followed him as he led the way through the wood.

Now and then it seemed to the girl as though she must be dreaming; the absolute stillness, the glory of the moonlight, the depth of the shadows, the mystery, the adventure, stirred her strangely, and she had a sense of having been through it all before, but long ago—yes—long ago.

The priest walked forward with head bowed. He appeared to be thinking deeply—praying, it

might be. After a time Etheldreda found herself murmuring broken, incoherent words of familiar prayers, and yet there was no dread of discovery upon her then—the May night was full of peace. As they reached the other side of the wood a nightingale burst forth into a rapturous song; the priest paused for an instant and listened with head erect. Then:

“All is quiet, Etheldreda,” he said, as she came up with him, “now we have to cross the open marsh, but methinks there be none abroad save those who have been summoned. I have but a short time to stay and it were well for all the Catholics here to profit of their opportunity.”

The girl looked up at him quickly: “You will see mother before you go again, Harold?”

“If it may be, Etheldreda. Yet I am forbidden to run any too great risks, unless it might be for the comforting of some passing soul. Yesterday I had thought to tarry by her side, if only to give her the consolations of Holy Mass and Communion. I came near running into the jaws of the enemy, and should have done so but for good old Tirzah.”

“You knew not that Uncle Cedric had arrived?”

“Nay, I knew naught of his coming, but I heard much from Tirzah after she had gotten me safely away. Poor mother! she will never see again—so Tirzah told me.”

“It is true, Harold, and yet I marvel at her peace and resignation, though, truth to tell, it angers me too sometimes for I find it not easy

to forgive the hand that wrought our father's death, and put you from your home."

The priest stood. "Etheldreda, you mustn't talk like that," he said sternly, "'twas all by God's permission. We are the 'Children of the Saints,' little sister mine, and shall we not follow after them? Think just a moment, dear, this life is not worth much after all. Our father is with God; his trials are at an end; believe me, he would not now have had them one less in number or one degree less of suffering. They are his glory—and they will be his glory for all eternity."

The girl was silenced. Father Franklin had resumed his walk and she plodded along by his side, her heart torn between admiration at his courage and rebellion against the troubles that had visited those so dear to her. More than all, it may be, against the danger that was her idolized brother's constant companion.

They had crossed the open tract of marshland now and stood on the edge of the white cliffs. A little to their right stood two gaunt grey towers between which were the ruined remains of the front of a church. Behind them the cliff had fallen carrying the greater part of the church with it and nearly all of the ancient graveyard. The spot was avoided by the country people after dark, for since the church had fallen and the silent occupants of the graveyard been ejected from their resting places, tales had gone abroad of strange lights that flitted from window to

window, and sounds of ghostly chanting that might be heard by anyone bold enough to venture into the precincts of St. Nicholas Church after nightfall.

Father Franklin had taken advantage of this superstition when he had found himself obliged to turn away from Ethendene in the company of the gypsy. Hitherto he had contrived to visit the home of his fathers at irregular intervals and there celebrate Mass for his mother and such of the neighbors who still remained faithful to the ancient Faith. Now all that was at an end. With Cedric Franklin ruling at Ethendene, the priest had perforce to seek some other meeting place for the members of his persecuted flock. In this Tirzah had aided him.

She was not a member of the Church, and so perhaps was more of a protection to him than she would otherwise have been. In his boyhood he had rescued her from certain death. A wild boar, maddened by pursuit, had overtaken her in a clearing of the Ethendene woods. The dogs held on to it, otherwise she must have perished. She deemed that her last hour had come and stood pale and trembling with fear that rendered her helpless. It was the work of a moment. Harold Franklin, the first of the hunt, saw her danger and, regardless of his own, rushed in singlehanded with a hunting knife and slew the enemy.

Since that day Tirzah had constituted herself a sort of guardian for the Franklins, especially

of the priest; yet no persuasions of his or of Dame Franklin could induce her to turn her thoughts to the things of faith.

"They be not for me, nor for my tribe, lady," she said invariably when the Dame endeavored to put before her the claims of the Church, "there'd be no room in that grand Heaven of yours for such as we," and nothing could persuade her otherwise. She had sorrowed as one of the family for the death of the Franklin and her indignation for the treachery of Cedric was magnificent. Of late, Father Franklin thought that her mind began to dimly apprehend the spiritual side of life and he redoubled his prayers for the conversion of his friend, for so she was, ready in every emergency to give such help as none other could, so that the priest called her laughingly, his "Little Providence."

She stepped now from the shadow of the north tower of St. Nicholas, and made a sign for them to follow her. They passed round the outside of the ruin though there was but a ledge for them to walk upon and a false step would have meant a bad fall, perhaps death. Father Franklin put Etheldreda before him and they crept cautiously round the base of the tower until they stood behind the wall that had been the west front of the church. Tirzah drew a lantern from under her cloak and flashed it across an open grave. Etheldreda started, for there was a ladder standing in the gloom of the vault below her and the gypsy bade her descend.

"Into that hole? that grave!" she exclaimed.

Tirzah laughed. "The dead hurt not the living," she said, "go first, Mistress Etheldreda, for I bide to hide the ladder. Trust me, Franklin," she added to the priest, "Tirzah the gypsy is faithful—she remembers."

"I know—I know!" said Father Franklin hastily, "but do you not come with us?"

"I come. You have further to go yet and you cannot go alone. I found the place and there is no other way to reach it than through these vaults. They are all connected and the country people dare not come hither after nightfall. Even a light is safe here for they say that there are ghosts in St. Nicholas Church."

They had all descended by this time. Tirzah removed the ladder and placed it behind some ruined masonry where it could not have been seen from above supposing that an enemy had the courage to peer into the vault. It was dark and damp under the ground. Tirzah's lantern alone lighted up the passage through the vaults of the old graveyard. Etheldreda leaned upon her brother's arm and shuddered from time to time as they came upon some ancient coffin that had fallen from its place when the ground fell away. The priest whispered to her to be of good courage, but she was nearly spent when at last they reached a small cave in the cliff that was open to the sea. The slanting rays of the declining moon illuminated the chalk walls and lay in a long silver pathway across the calm water that seemed

to reach to Heaven. The cave was half-way up the cliff and quite inaccessible from the beach below.

For a moment Etheldreda stood amazed, then she recognized a few neighbors whom the gypsy had been able to gather together, and a rude altar set for the celebration of Mass.

CAPTER III.

A CHANCE MEETING.

ETHELDREDA addressed herself to her prayers and after awhile took her turn to kneel at the feet of the priest to make her confession. She arose strengthened and went to her place amongst her friends and neighbors to assist at the Mass.

The two wax tapers that flickered in the breeze were the only illumination of the cavern save for the moonlight that flooded it with a weird radiance and enabled them to follow every action of the priest as the Holy Sacrifice went on. It seemed to the girl that she had never before realized the solemnity and sweetness of the ritual. The priest, her own brother, who stood at the rude altar was already a confessor for the Faith; her father laid down his life in defence of the same Holy Church; she herself, foresaw only increasing sorrows and difficulties to come with the years; yet, in spite of troubles past and forebodings for the future, peace seemed to overshadow her until she almost understood the calmness with which her mother was able to meet overwhelming trials and misfortunes in her advancing age. Nay, for one brief ecstatic moment she fancied that she

would not have it otherwise and gloried in the opportunity of proving her fidelity to the Man of Sorrows.

The Sanctus fell upon her ears with a new sense and she held her breath in awe for the coming of the Son of God. The soft spring air came freely into the little cave and the pure white moonlight; she thought of Bethlehem and the anxiety of the Mother for the Babe. Tirzah was watching, she knew, and it was all safe, but she could not help a little thrill of anxiety lest some interruption might mar the peace of that gathering in the early dawn of the May morning. The moment of Communion found her restless again, just when she would most have wished to be at peace but she could not help it—it was beyond her power. Besides, the moment of exaltation had passed, as such moments do, all too swiftly, (we could not bear them else,) and had left her with an increased sense of weakness and helplessness. For a few moments more she knelt praying against herself, for fatigue was beginning to overcome her and she was conscious of a great desire to sleep. With an effort she roused herself and found the little congregation already gone. The grey dawn was just beginning to streak the eastern sky and Father Franklin was kneeling almost at her side. He turned toward her at the moment and smiled but he did not rise and Etheldreda came hastily and knelt close to him.

“Bless me, Father!” she said, and then: “O Harold! Harold!”

He passed his arm around her. "Nay, courage, little sister mine, you are overtired. Go home quickly, 'twill soon be light. Tirzah will go with you. And now, goodbye! Tell mother I will see her ere long and—" his voice took on a shade of anxiety—"you do forgive Cedric Franklin, do you not?"

"I had to, Harold. Just now when I knelt before the altar I seemed to feel that resentment slipping from me. I forgave him then—I know I did—and easily. 'Tis harder now, but I'll try. Harold, pray for me," she added earnestly as she rose to her feet.

"Of course I will. You are a member of my flock, Etheldreda, and though at times a most unruly lamb, all the dearer on that account."

She laughed. "Nay, Harold, you are over good to me. But, indeed, I am more contented now, and I must hasten for the day dawns already and I would not that any should observe my return."

He accompanied her to the foot of the ladder where he bade her farewell.

"Farewell, Harold. Be wary—for our sakes as well as for your own," she said as she followed Tirzah.

Already the light began to creep up mysteriously grey from the sea. The marsh was astir with the first movement of life. Here and there they passed a wild duck's nest amongst the reeds or a sleepy snipe sprang up under their feet. They walked swiftly and in silence; once they regained the shelter of the wood they proceeded more

easily. The light grew and spread, a few long streaks of crimson warned them to hasten if they would reach the hall unobserved. Etheldreda began to wonder if the Dame had missed her and if so what she thought of her absence. She decided to dismiss Tirzah and turned to the gypsy:

"Thank you, Tirzah," she said, laying her hand on the woman's arm, "I will go alone now, believe me, 'twill be safer so."

The woman hesitated, then a look of intelligence came into her eyes:

"It may be so, Mistress Franklin, but I will stay here and watch. 'Tis but a short walk to the hall now, and you have the key?"

"Ay, I have the key, Tirzah, but I will not need to use it for I left the outer door unlocked. Farewell!" She bent toward the gypsy impulsively for a moment, "I thank you, Tirzah!" she said again, and her lips lightly touched the woman's forehead. Then she turned and left her.

Tirzah flushed—Etheldreda had won to her a soul as true as steel and as tender as it is in the heart of woman to be; nay more, she had won the gypsy to a realization of Christianity. Unwittingly, she had gained a soul.

It was almost light when she crossed the strip of open park and slipped with a sigh of relief into the shelter of the shrubbery. From thence it would be less difficult to enter the house unobserved and she hurried forward.

"Whither away, so early?"

Etheldreda looked up startled; Cedric was standing before her with folded arms and an

odd smile upon his face. The girl stood suddenly and her face paled, then flushed.

"You took me by surprise, Uncle," she said, "I love to watch the sun rise these spring mornings," she added softly. He looked at her keenly—

"'Tis scarce safe for a maid to go thus unattended," he said meaningly. Her eyes fell before his, "and I like not to see you thus early abroad, niece. Another day, and it pleases you to watch the sun rise, I will accompany you."

"Nay, Uncle, 'tis not necessary, I assure you. I often stroll in the park in the early morning. Mother hath never forbidden me, and I be not like to meet with strangers here in Ethendene."

"Nevertheless, I desire that you wander not forth unattended, niece. Trust me, I know the times, and the evil thoughts of men, and for your mother's sake be not rash," he added hastily as he turned to walk beside her. They came to the great entrance of the hall; it was open. With stately courtesy he bade her enter and followed her into the house. She crossed the hall rapidly, it was still somewhat dark within and her eyes were dazzled by the glory without. Her foot struck something and she fell forward but saved herself by clutching at the stair. She had fallen over Andrew, the gardener's boy, who lay asleep amongst the rushes in the great hall, and had not wakened when Cedric's men had betaken themselves to the stables to care for their horses.

"How now, sirrah!" shouted Cedric as the youth picked himself up. He strode forward angrily. "Get you gone, knave! Know you no bet-

ter than to lie in the path of Mistress Etheldreda! Fie, man! to your work—the sun is up.”

Andrew stood up unsteadily; he had been fast asleep and could not waken all at once. The girl sped up the stairs, she wanted to recollect herself before the difficulties of the day came on her again. She entered her chamber quickly and locked the door.

Dame Franklin lay still as she had left her—but awake. Her head stirred on the pillow as she heard the key turn in the lock and she called the girl to her softly.

“It is day, child, for I heard men stirring below and your uncle’s voice raised in anger. Hath aught befallen!”

“Nay, mother. Naught of ill—but I have been forth. Harold called me—he came by night and threw a stone into my room. I followed him and assisted at his Mass. Mother! ’twas the most wonderful night I ever remember. In a cave below St. Nicholas Church. The moon shone in on us like a blessing from Heaven. Harold bade me tell you he would find a way to visit you ere long. Poor fellow! It seems he knew not of Uncle Cedric’s coming and nearly ran into the snare,” she sighed. Dame Franklin did not speak for a moment, her lips were moving in prayer. Etheldreda stooped and kissed her gently: “I am growing selfish, mother mine, yet how can I help being glad for the comfort that has been mine this day! I am weary though, for I have not slept and methinks Uncle Cedric suspected somewhat when he met me in the shrubbery but now.”

"Did Cedric meet you? Did he ask you aught, child?"

"Ay, he asked and I answered, but I told him naught. He asked where I had been and I replied that I had been watching the sunrise—quite true and yet not quite the whole truth."

"Think you he suspected aught?"

"At first—yes. Afterward—I think not. But, mother, you would rise. See, here comes Hilda, suffer her to tire you this morning for I fain would sleep a little. Bid her call me when you are ready."

She withdrew, threw herself upon her couch, and slept at once, with the deep unconscious sleep of the young when they are weary.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE Franklin had spent a few days looking into the affairs of Ethendene and regulating the household to suit the requirements of its new owners. There was little to be done, for Dame Franklin, after the example of the Valiant Woman, had "looked well to the ways of her house," and in this Etheldreda had been her trusted assistant.

Now he was desirous of paying a visit to his own home. It was several months since he had seen Dame Margaret and their only son, Walter, for he had been in close attendance on certain dignitaries of the court while his suit was pending. The Dame his wife had pleaded with him most earnestly in the matter of the Ethendene estates, begging him to restore them to his nephew, the rightful heir and true Franklin. But he had not chosen to listen to her arguments nor to yield to her entreaties. Now that he had succeeded in establishing himself in his brother's house with no resistance from Dame Gertrude he thought it might be as well to urge his wife to join him there.

Dame Gertrude made no demur when Cedric unfolded his plans to her—but—there was Etheldreda. Cedric suspected that somehow she contrived to see her brother and that was a possible danger to himself; he could not find out either how she managed it, but the more he thought about it the more he was convinced that it was so. He had had a strong suspicion of something of the kind when, on the morning after his arrival, he had come upon her in the shrubbery. Her start of surprise at his sudden appearance and her change of color had looked very like guilt to him. He had searched the shrubbery thoroughly as soon as the girl had gone to her chamber but he had found nothing there nor any sign of any person having been there.

On the whole he was perplexed, and although since that day his niece had evidently striven to please him he was shrewd enough to realize that she had shown him her real feelings on the evening before. At times he saw the Dame's influence in it all and he was beginning to appreciate her rightly.

Just at first he had been inclined to despise her for her submission, but a very few days showed him the strength and sweetness of that gentle character and his contempt turned to respect, nay, almost to reverence. None knew better than he how and what she had suffered and his own part in the making of those sorrows that had aged her thus prematurely and his conscience was more ill at ease than it might have been had Dame Franklin displayed hatred or resistance.

So, on the whole, he decided that the time had come for him to bring Dame Margaret to Ethendene. She would doubtless need persuading and would greatly dread the painful meeting with her sister-in-law. Then he remembered that Etheldreda, as a child, had been a great favorite with her aunt. He was afraid of leaving her alone at Ethendene. In this he saw his opportunity; the girl should go with him to Fordwich and help him to persuade Dame Margaret to return with him.

Etheldreda demurred at first. She had been counting on her uncle's absence to bring Harold to the hall that he might give the Sacraments to her mother. It was no slight disappointment to have her pleasant plan frustrated but she knew that resistance was useless. Dame Gertrude bade her go and she knew that Father Franklin would have decided against her had he been there.

"Go with him, Etheldreda," said her mother, "it may be that good will come out of it—and obedience is better than sacrifice, child."

"I fear me, mother, lest some evil befall you, alone, with, it may be, spies about you. But I'll set Tirzah to watch; she'll contrive to let Uncle Cedric know should any ill threaten you in our absence."

The widow smiled: "Nay, child, there be naught can affright me now. For myself I care not; 'tis but of you I think. Beware how you anger your uncle, my child. He be conscience-sore, I verily believe, but fearful, lest in undoing the

wrong that eats into his soul he meet with the thing that men call 'evil.' ”

“Of late the thought hath come to me too, mother. We will e’en pray for him; ’tis a sorry sight to see a soul stuck fast in the mire of earthly goods.” There was a little ring of exaltation in the girl’s voice that her mother noted. Sometimes she hoped that Etheldreda would turn to religion when she needed her no longer. For the present her child’s duty was apparent, but the Dame began to feel that her days were numbered and she would have been easier had she known that Etheldreda had the prospect of a safe shelter in some religious house in France or the Netherlands. But all that was in the hands of God and the Dame was wise enough to leave it there.

It was a fine warm June day when Cedric rode forth with his niece taking all his followers with him and leaving old Michael, the house-steward, to guard Dame Gertrude. She greatly desired to see her son. For two weeks she had hoped that he would find a way to visit her and in spite of the time that had elapsed since his arrival she was hoping still. She knew that he would come as soon as it was possible.

He had no other thought, but he had been forbidden to take unnecessary risks, for the sake of the souls that so needed his ministrations. It was Tirzah who discovered the Franklin’s absence and the reason of his journey. When she took him the news Father Franklin was seated on a piece of rock in his cavern. At his feet ran

a little stream that gushed from a crevice in the chalk and fell over the edge of the cliff to the beach below. His retreat was safe, and light, and airy, and in summer it might pass as a pleasant hermitage. She had furnished him with a bed of clean straw and a few necessities and it made a convenient place for his people to visit him. Best of all he was able to reserve some particles of the Blessed Sacrament for the consolation of the dying and those of the living who succeeded in coming to him for the Sacraments. It was a strange life that he led in his solitude and the greater part of it he spent in prayerful preparation for the violent death that he surely foresaw.

He was looking out to sea, his clasped hands lying on his open book when Tirzah came to him. The day was waning but it would not be dark for some time, for the evenings are long in the month of June and the nights scarcely dark at all, save for a couple of hours at midnight. Tirzah told her story and he rose:

"I must go to my mother at once," he said.

"Not yet, Franklin," she replied, "wait until after the sun has set, then wrap yourself in this grey cloak and meet me by the tower of St. Nicholas' Church."

"But in the meantime, Tirzah? Think you the Franklin will return?"

"Nay, Franklin," she laid a special emphasis on the title—to her the priest was "The Franklin"—the rightful heir to Ethendene. "Nay, he be gone to Fordwich to bring hence his wife and son.

Mistress Etheldreda rode with him; the Dame is alone."

"And you have found means to effect an entrance to the hall?"

"Ay, Franklin. I have knowledge of an old door that leads into the vault under the old chapel. From thence it will be easy to enter the house unobserved through the kitchens."

"Then I will be ready. Farewell, and thank you, Tirzah, God bless you!"

She disappeared into the darkness of the passage and the priest returned to his prayers. At sunset he took the consecrated particles from their hiding place, wrapped himself in the cloak that the gypsy had brought him and knelt in prayer until the light began to fade. Then he went to the meeting place.

Tirzah was there before him and led the way in silence. The twilight had thrown a veil of misty grey over the marsh and he realized the usefulness of the grey cloaks that made them almost invisible in the failing light. He was a little uneasy because of the Blessed Sacrament, but they reached the shrubbery without accident and here Tirzah turned back. It was as dark by this time as it would be and Father Franklin crossed the park to the old door that led into the vault. The ivy had nearly covered it but he remembered it well. He wondered how he had ever forgotten it, and in a few moments he had found it and was safely within the building. He had explored it in his boyhood and it was not

very long before he found the door that gave access to the kitchens. As he pushed against it something fell to the ground with a clatter; it was only a broom but it had attracted the attention of old Hilda to the open door and she uttered a piercing shriek. For a moment he drew back, then as he saw it was only Hilda and that she was alone he came out boldly. She knew him in a moment but there was no time for words. There was a sound of running feet. She pushed the priest back hastily into the passage and closed the door. He turned the key on the inside and awaited the issue. Andrew, the gardener's boy, came panting into the room:

"Who is it? Why? Hilda! what's it all about?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nay, Andrew," she said, crossing herself quickly, "I saw the Franklin! Living or dead I saw him. He stood beside me here," she said indicating the great chimney beside which the priest had stood for a moment.

The boy laughed uneasily—"the Franklin! Nay, then you are getting old, Hilda. Ghosts walk not. The Franklin be dead—I believe not in your ghosts; 'tis more like to be a trick. Give me the torch—I'll lay the ghost, I'll warrant you!" He appeared to be searching the kitchens for a while. Father Franklin waited quietly, he knew that the boy would be scarcely likely to look in the vault and if he did, there was another way out of it that came to him just then, although he had forgotten it for years. Apparently the boy was soon tired of

his search. "I see nothing," he said more quietly. "I like not your ghosts, Hilda, though I believe not in them, an you need me not, I'll go back to my bed."

"Nay, I need you not. An the Franklin come again he'll do *me* no hurt. He had ever a kind word for a faithful servant."

The boy went off whistling and the priest came out from his hiding place.

"'Tis a poor-hearted lad," said Hilda, "yet trust him not, Father. He be new hereabouts and there be those who call him 'spy.'" So saying she led the way to Dame Gertrude's chamber.

The Dame was kneeling at her devotions when Hilda whispered to her that Harold was there. She rose trembling and came to him.

"My son!—Nay, bless me, Father," she said brokenly.

He took her in his arms for a moment. She had altered strangely; her hair had been bright red-gold when he had last looked upon her. Now it was snow white. Her poor eyes could not see him; for the pity of it he could have wept. Then he was the priest again——

'God bless you, mother," he said and Dame Franklin fell on her knees. He let her kneel for a moment while he whispered to her that he bore the Blessed Sacrament. The wonder and the sweetness of it brought tears to her relief. They passed the hours until midnight in prayer and holy converse, then the priest summoned Hilda and heard her confession. After that he had not long to stay and as soon as he had administered

the Holy Communion to the two women he crept back to the vault and thence to the shrubbery.

A slight sound disturbed him for a moment and he paused to listen. He heard no more, but for greater precaution he crept away in the opposite direction and reached his retreat by a circuitous route just before sunrise.

CHAPTER V.

MASQUERADE.

DAME MARGARET had bewitched them all. Etheldreda sang her praises to her mother, to Hilda—even to Tirzah, and though it was long before the gypsy could forget that she was Cedric's wife, at length she yielded to the charm of Walter's mother. She was small in size, almost tiny, with dark wilful curls that strayed from under her cap, and red cheeks that a girl of twenty might have envied.

Walter was just like her, a delicate boy of fifteen with large eyes that seemed at times to look through you, and at others to pass you over completely as though he saw you not. He had taken a great fancy to Dame Gertrude and sat with her or read to her by the hour. She used laughingly to say that she had gotten him in exchange for Ethendene and that she was not sure that she had not the best of the bargain. However that was, they had a great deal in common that neither Etheldreda nor her aunt could understand.

Dame Margaret had a difficult part to play and had Gertrude resented, even slightly, her

presence at Ethendene, her position would have been intolerable. As it was she was keenly conscious that she had no right there and the knowledge weighed her down—sometimes it seemed more than she could bear. She wearied too, for her little country home at Fordwich where the big sailing barges came up from Sandwich, a busy port in those days. She missed the bustle of the little wharf on the bank of the Stour, and the parties of travellers who enlivened the Canterbury road.

Once, when the Franklin had been absent for a day or two, she had accompanied Etheldreda and Walter on a visit to the priest. There, with the pleasant morning sun shining in upon the little congregation, Father Franklin celebrated Mass. Walter had served him, devoutly and recollectedly. He was a model server and Etheldreda had been surprised to see him in this new character for she had known him only as a joyous comrade and good playfellow.

Some few days after she bethought herself of some old fineries, the remains of happier days, that were stored away in the old loft that ran the full length of the house under the pointed roof. Taking the boy with her she climbed up the ladder that gave access to it and they drew it up after them.

"Now we shall be unobserved, Walter," she said. The boy laughed.

"And wherefore all this mystery, Etheldreda? What would you amongst all these musty chests?"

Her face grew grave immediately. "I have a

plan, Walter. I'll not tell it yet. Come hither and help me open this oaken chest. Ah!—" she uttered a smothered cry for they had dislodged a mouse that had run behind it for safety and it ran across her foot.

Walter laughed: "Nay, cousin, the mouse will not hurt you. See! I hold it in my hand—a poor wee creature with little eyes that might be merry but for its fear of us." He stroked the little animal gently with one finger. It lay still and trembling in his hand. Etheldreda peeped at it timidly, then more boldly—finally her hand went out and she stroked it daintily.

"'Tis a poor little thing," she said musingly, "more frightened of us than I of it. 'Tis a shame to be such a coward, Walter. Give him to me; I would e'en make friends with him."

The boy put it into her hand, but ere her half unwilling fingers closed over it, the mouse dropped to the floor and ran away. They did not find it again and returned to their search. The chest was locked and they had to hunt for some time before they found the key. When they succeeded in opening it, Etheldreda gave a little cry of delight for it was full of fine dresses of a by-gone fashion.

"These doubtless belong to my Grandame," she said as she drew forth a kirtle of gold-colored satin and an over dress of green velvet with a long train. She slipped on the overdress; its hue contrasted sharply, though not unpleasingly, with her red-gold hair.

The boy looked at her for a moment: "You

are beautiful, cousin," he said simply, as he might have said it is a fine day.

She laughed: "You are beautiful, cousin," she mocked, "you are solemn, cousin; nay, you are indiscreet, cousin! Oh! Walter! Walter! and I thought you had eyes only for blue heavens and painted windows! Why! you're a living boy after all. Methinks, when you have waked from your dreams you'll be a man some day."

"A truce to your mockery, cousin," he replied with a hint of sternness in his voice, "these be no times for trifling. These be days for lusty fighting, and earnest service, and noble deaths."

"Deaths?"

"Ay, lady, so I said. The lady my mother knoweth my mind and that I but wait a fitting age to prepare for the priesthood."

"You!—YOU—Walter! Nay, forgive me, cousin. I had not thought this of you—an it be so I give you joy with all my heart, though it be scarce like to bring you joy in this life."

"But in the life to come, Etheldreda!"

"Joy everlasting!" she replied and there fell a little silence between them more eloquent than words. And that was the beginning of their real comradeship. Frequently after that they repaired to the old loft, the girl busy with the fineries that she discovered there but with a purpose behind the frivolity that it served to conceal.

The Franklin returned. The evenings were growing longer; already the trees in the park began to take on hues of russet and gold, and wild howling winds swept gustily over the marshes.

He had taken to sitting moodily in his chair in the Great Hall when the doors were closed for the night and the pine logs made a merry blaze that was very cheering in the first chill of the year.

Dame Gertrude was busy at her wheel, her hands were never idle, and the Franklin's wife sat with a great embroidery frame before her. The flickering light from the crackling logs made bright reflections in the gold and gems of her work and set off her dark warm beauty admirably. She was making an effort to keep her husband in conversation, for she was growing uneasy lest he should question her concerning the absence of Etheldreda and Walter. It was a long while since they had disappeared and she began to wish for their return. The unexpected sound of a lute in the stone gallery above made her look up. Cedric's eyes followed hers:

"'Tis within," he said, and she wondered at the awe in his voice.

"Ay, Cedric, 'tis within," she repeated and held her breath for, on the dark oak staircase, where the flickering lights from the hearth fell full upon them stood the mummers. For a second she asked herself how they had gotten there. Then she smiled quietly to herself: 'tis hard to deceive the eye of a mother.

There were only two of them, a lady dressed in a wonderful gown of green and gold, with a veil of shining tissue that entirely concealed her features, and a boy in doublet and hose of lavender satin with a short velvet cloak of dark

purple velvet lined with primrose. His plumed hat had a jewelled clasp and a mask concealed his features. He carried the lute that had startled them. The Franklin leaned back in his seat and watched their advance. When they had descended the stairs and stood in the midst of the circle around the hearth, the boy began to speak:

"Most noble Franklin! this fair lady, my companion, and I crave leave to divert you and your ladies with music and a dance. Have we your permission?"

Cedric entered into the spirit of the game. "Ay, good youth," he said, "play on, so you can banish dull care. And for the lady, an she please to dance she'll dance; I'll not forbid, for did I so she'd dance despite me, being a woman."

The lady bowed silently to him and to the ladies, then she began to dance. A slow stately measure it was, called a base dance or minuet. The boy accompanied her on the lute that he carried. Cedric watched them half smilingly. Once when the lady made a wrong step, he called to her. She hesitated but retrieved herself almost instantly and continued to dance to the end. The Franklin leaned back in his chair well pleased. It was long since the Great Hall had resounded to music and the tap, tap of dancing feet, and it was a pleasant change to him for he hated the monotony of country life and only the necessity of keeping the estates that the Queen had given him held him in residence at Ethendene.

When the dance came to an end the Franklin rose: "I would tread a measure with you, fair

lady," he said mockingly. She threw back her veil suddenly revealing the features of his niece.

"I shall be honored, most noble Franklin," she said jestingly. He could not discover whether there was mischief or satisfaction in her tones. The boy discarded his mask with a grin to his mother. Dame Gertrude touched her sister-in-law's arm gently:

"What means it?" she asked softly.

"'Tis but Etheldreda and Walter who masquerade for our diversion, Gertrude," she replied. A look of perplexity appeared on the Dame's face, but she said nothing more and the lute had recommenced in a livelier strain.

The Franklin was a man of stately presence, and he danced well, but Etheldreda was young and she danced better still. They made a striking couple, he clad in the bravery of a plum-colored doublet slashed with amber and she in all the finery of her grandmother's gown. The close-fitting underdress fitted her to perfection and the heavy richness of the velvet became her tall figure.

The twang of the lute and the tap of the dancing feet revived old memories for Dame Gertrude and she wondered how the girl could dance—and in that place—and—with the Franklin. Her face grew anxious, she had thought Etheldreda more serious—not quite like other maidens; she had looked on her as one somewhat apart from the rest of the world—not at any rate as one easily consoled for that which had been. This dancing whim was almost a desecration in her eyes and she did not understand it. She did not under-

stand either the strength of the girl, or that her gay laugh covered an aching heart, or that the Franklin's feet were beating the sense of wrong into her brain with every step. Even the mother did not understand that Etheldreda was playing a part and weaving a plot with the aid of Walter, the son of the man who had injured them so cruelly.

Cedric was not by nature a villain, only a coward. His treachery had been the outcome of fear, craven fear,, lest a man who threatened him should take action against him and bring him to death. For that dread he had delivered his brother to the law and, in order to insure his own safety, had informed against his nephew and sued for the Ethendene estates. But for all his precautions he was a marked man and he trembled sometimes when he remembered that his wife had not conformed—nor his son—and the boy was growing of an age when he might be called upon to take an oath or at least attend the services of the new religion in the parish church. It was true that they lived a considerable distance from it and were therefore scarcely expected to make frequent appearances there, but once or twice a year at the least their attendance would be required if they were to live in peace at Ethendene.

He dreaded mentioning the matter to Dame Margaret, who was a good Catholic and had trained her son in the old religion in spite of his father. She had made no secret of her feeling in the matter of his apostacy and the betrayal of his brother, but she was too wise to keep on telling him of

it and went her way in silence, trusting to prayer and the power of her example to reclaim him. She had loved him once, nay, she loved him still. Even though he had fallen low he was Walter's father. She never spoke of his crime to the boy and he never mentioned it to her. It was too painful and they avoided the topic by mutual consent.

Something of all this flashed through Dame Margaret's mind as she watched the sprightly coranto in which the Franklin and her niece were engaged. It ended at last and the girl ran to Dame Gertrude: "I am tired, mother," she said, "let me sit beside you for a while. 'Tis long since I danced and indeed my heart scarce keeps time with my feet. Yet 'tis well to be of good cheer, and mine uncle is sad."

The Dame sighed and passed her hand lightly over the girl's dress:

"You found it in the old oak chest, Etheldreda?" she asked and the girl detected a tone of anxiety in her voice.

"Ay, mother," she answered hastily, "and there be other fineries. I trow Aunt Margaret would look well in some of those old gowns. I'll take her with me when next I visit the chest, 'twill do her good to play the mummer for once—and 'drive dull care away' as mine uncle saith."

"What said he?" asked the Franklin suddenly.

"That it be good to drive dull care away, uncle."

"Ay, Faith! and so it is, niece. Life be too short for over much weeping, and youth cometh but once. Dance merrily, for the time is short,"

he answered bitterly and threw himself into the deep chair from which he had risen. There was a moment of silence. Dame Margaret looked down upon her son who had seated himself upon a low stool at her feet.

"Sing something, Walter," she said laying her hand for a moment on the boy's dark curls. He looked up at her as though to read her meaning, then he struck a few chords of prelude and broke forth into a wild song, a kind of saga, relating the wonderful exploits of an ancient Viking king. The boy was swayed by the passion of the music, his eyes glowed, his form trembled, yet his voice never faltered. It was a song of battle, of fierce deeds and hot hatred that died away in a wail of weakness and death. The silence that followed on its ending was profound, no one spoke nor looked up. When they did, the Franklin was gone. They had not noticed his departure and they wondered a little, but no one made any remark just then.

When Etheldreda accompanied the Dame to her chamber she spoke:

"I fear me, Walter's song was ill chosen," she said musingly, "Cedric liked it not. I know that he went out for I felt him pass me. Bid the boy beware how he angers his father, Etheldreda. And be prudent yourself, my child. There be spies all about us—I feel them near me—I greatly fear me that your Uncle has made but a sorry bargain, for all that he is Lord of Ethendene."

"He reaps what he sowed, mother. Yet I would that he would repent. 'Tis piteous to see the careworn look in his eyes and the sudden trembling

that comes to him at times. An evil conscience is a bad companion. Mother! I dread him more and more. His hands are red with blood—will he stop at aught?”

“Hush, Etheldreda! we may not judge him. Belike he repents already, and longs to undo the evil—but dares not. Such remorse must indeed be a very hell—to know Satan for your master and to be afraid to break with him is punishment indeed. But pray for him—that way lies forgiveness and revenge—the Christian’s lawful revenge—the returning of good for evil.”

The girl was silent, she knew that she could not trust herself to speak just then and as soon as the Dame was ready for the night, she took her masquerading dress and went to the loft to replace it. The ladder was standing in its place and she ran up it swiftly; the moon was just rising but its light was as yet dim and uncertain, she thought she heard a movement and stopped for a moment to listen, decided that it was only imagination and proceeded to lay the dress in the oaken chest which was already open. She was startled to find it so, she had been very sure that she had closed and locked it that afternoon after taking out the gown. But the key was in the lock, and she decided that in her haste she must have left it there. She was determined that there should be no mistake this time and made sure that the chest was locked before turning to leave the loft.

She had an unpleasant sense of the nearness of some person, and peered into the dark corners of the loft. She almost fancied that she could hear

someone breathing and for a moment nearly lost control of herself and screamed aloud. She had never experienced anything like it before and it unnerved her, but she was nevertheless determined that if anyone was there she would discover him.

The moon rose slowly above the trees like a large silver lamp in the dark of the sky. It seemed a long while before she could see anything clearly, when at last the light streamed in at the window, she could see nothing.

The sudden click, as of a spring released, startled her, and she held both hands firmly over her mouth for fear she might cry out. Her eyes were fastened on the oak chest. To her horror it moved—slowly—slowly—as if unseen hands drew it aside. Etheldreda stood rooted to the spot; she no longer had power to move; every nerve was keenly alive while she herself was bound in terror. The beating of her heart was a keen pain—an agony of fear, such as she had never dreamed of—a shapeless fear that crouched at her side ready to spring upon her. She tried to pray and signed herself with the cross. The spell was broken and she tottered forward. The square of flooring that had been covered by the oak chest tilted back revealing a hollow space and out of the dark emerged the head of Tirzah the gypsy. She started back when she saw Etheldreda, but as soon as she recognized her she emerged from the hiding place.

"I have looked for your coming this long while, Mistress Etheldreda. I bring you a message," she said in a low voice, "hush! speak not lest we be overheard. Father Franklin bade me tell you he

leaves here to-morrow for—nay, I forget—he would not have me tell you where, for greater safety in case of surprise. He bids you be of good cheer and sends his blessing to you and all the household. He bade me find out also if Cedric remains here, or if he journeys to Fordwich again.”

“Nay, Tirzah, I know not surely, yet methinks I heard him say that he would go hence at Michaelmas, but whether to Fordwich or to London I do not know. Bid Harold to pray for us and to be wary—and tell him that I will let mother know of his absence. Goes he on special affairs?”

“Ay. At least I know not surely—only that he will perform a marriage while he is away.”

Etheldreda was still looking at the opening in the floor, and an idea came to her: “Where does your passage lead?” she asked.

“To the north tower of St. Nicholas’ Church. I knew that it was there of old, but it has taken me long enough to find it all the same. Some day you shall explore it yourself, not now, it is too rough yet. As soon as it is cleared out somewhat you shall see it.”

“And have you no fear that it will be discovered by others?”

“None, Mistress Etheldreda. And even were it so, I have means to close it so that no priest-hunter but would think that he had reached the end. Farewell, the hour is late, to your chamber, dear Mistress.” She stepped back into the blackness of the grave-like space. A moment more and the floor was restored to its wonted condition. Ethel-

dreda replaced the oaken chest as softly as she could, stole down the ladder and so to her chamber.

For long she lay awake, living over again the moments of terror she had passed through in the old loft, and devising schemes for introducing Father Franklin to the Hall by this new means of access, the discovery of which by the gypsy had completed and crowned her plans.

CHAPTER VI.

CHECKMATE.

Two days before Michaelmas the Franklin rode away. He had wearied exceedingly of his inactive life at Ethendene for he was no sportsman and without excitement or the stir of camp or court he was lost. Before leaving he had announced his intention of spending a few days at Fordwich and possibly of visiting London before his return.

To the delight of the Catholic household he had taken both of his serving men with him. They were the only new ones in the house, with the exception of Dame Margaret's tirewoman, who was also a fervent Catholic, and they felt safer with the Franklin and his men away. The old servants had been in the service of the former Master of Ethendene practically all their lives and formed with the Dame and her children, but one family in the good old way of those days.

Cedric's departure was the signal for renewed masquerades. Both Etheldreda and Walter hunted the old loft where they discovered fresh dresses and rich embroideries stowed away, which they used freely to make diversions in the Great Hall when

evening came and the household was assembled about the hearth.

Walter had a pleasing voice and was besides a very creditable performer on the lute, delighting especially in old French ballads and troubadour songs that charmed his aunt who had received part of her education in a Paris convent after which she had spent a few months at the court of Queen Claud of France.

Etheldreda never sang; she had never done so since the troubles had come to Ethendene. She would sit with a piece of sewing in her hands, not working but listening, rather contemptuously, to Walter's light music, but her mind was full of plans, and she experienced a feeling of irritation at seeing the two women who had suffered so much apparently cheerful and contented. Now and then she would steal away to the loft where she could no longer hear the offending music, and open the old presses shaking out their contents on the floor. She had rearranged those presses, placing them all together at one end of the room with their backs against the wall. She had piled the chests in front of them; they were for the most part empty, and so she had arranged them to shelter the spot where Tirzah's passage opened into the room. She had left the trap door uncovered but the empty chests were grouped around it in such a way that it might have been opened and closed again in case of sudden necessity without anyone having been seen to leave or enter it.

The oak chest that had been her grandmother's wardrobe stood on the top of an older and larger

one so that it was considerably raised above the floor. It was a curious old piece of furniture, deeply carven with a rich design of vine leaves and grapes. The wood was quite black with age and Walter had helped her to clean and polish it. Of late she had but seldom opened it, and she kept the key suspended on a ribbon that she wore around her neck.

The day after Cedric's departure Tirzah came again to the Hall. Dame Gertrude, as usual, was spinning, Margaret embroidering and Etheldreda sewing busily on a long strip of fine linen, while Walter read aloud to them from an illuminated manuscript.

It was past noon when Tirzah came and beckoned to Etheldreda. She rose quietly to follow the gypsy—

"What is it, child?" asked Dame Gertrude softly. Walter was still reading and had not noticed the interruption.

"Tirzah, mother! I go to hear what she has to say; 'tis most like some message from Harold," she added in a lower tone.

Dame Gertrude's hands trembled so that she was forced to interrupt her work. Walter had come to the end of a page and looked up:

"Tirzah!" he exclaimed, closing his book.

She advanced a little into the room: "Good morrow, Ladies!" she said, "I would speak with Dame Gertrude or Mistress Etheldreda, an it please you." At a sign from the Dame she drew nearer, "'Tis a message from the Franklin, so please you, Lady," she continued, dropping her voice cau-

tiously, "he bade me say that he would be with you soon after supper and would say Mass here after midnight."

"Here, Tirzah! Nay, how can that be, the chapel hath long been closed; yet if indeed it might be so how proud and happy should we all be. Nay, speak freely, Tirzah; we be all friends here to-day. Where will Father Franklin celebrate the Mass? and will it be safe, think you? Alas! I am but a coward since I think of danger in such a cause—yet—the priest is my son and 'tis he would suffer did tidings of his coming leak out."

"God forbid, Lady! Father Franklin bade me say that he would celebrate in the old loft. He be not without means of escape should any danger arise; also he wills not that I should tell anyone of this save those who already know of it, for shared secrets are apt to be dangerous. Therefore, seek not to know further. She glanced meaningly at Etheldreda as she spoke; the girl answered her with a look, but she did not speak.

Dame Gertrude extended her hand to the gypsy: "God bless you, Tirzah, and bring you safely into the fold in his own good time," she said, a little tremulously, for the woman had flung herself on her knees and was covering the Dame's hand with kisses. For a little while she was too much moved to speak, when at last she found her voice, she cried:

"I have a boon to crave, anent that matter, dear lady. 'Twas Father Franklin bade me ask it. To-night, he bade me tell you, Tirzah the gypsy

receives baptism at his hand, therefore he would that I ask you to be sponsor for me at the font."

"That will I, and right gladly. But you surprise us, Tirzah. This be a new thing—tell us how it chanced."

They had gathered closer round, eager to hear the gypsy's story. The woman's eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled.

"Nay, I know not how it chanced," she said, "but ever since the Franklin trusted to me I felt this coming. At first I fought against it. I loved the Franklins and would have given my life a thousand times to serve them, but, this I could not do; not for contempt of the Faith, but for fear of the danger that it brings."

"Yet you have ventured much for us, Tirzah!" broke in Etheldreda.

"Ventured! Nay then, Mistress Etheldreda, did I not belong to the Franklin! When he saved my poor life it was no longer mine, but his. And so, an it might be given in exchange for his, 'twas my part to lay it down and gladly. But I looked not to place it in jeopardy on mine own account, and thus I delayed. 'Twas Father Franklin who showed me this: that there was another had given His life for mine and when I came to understand that I took the Faith, with all the risks that hedge it about. Yet, for the Franklin's sake, I keep this secret from my Tribe; did they know of it, his life would be forfeit to their revenge, it being so easy to inform against a priest. But, an they know it not, all may yet be well and they'll aid me, for they owe my

debt to him even as their own, and he is safe with them."

Dame Gertrude broke the silence that ensued on the gypsy's speech.

"Well then, to-night, Tirzah! nay, kneel not, child," she added gently, for the gypsy had remained on her knees. "Come sit beside me, to-day you have given us such a joy as brings us nearer Heaven. How often we have prayed for this! 'tis time now to cry 'Thank God!' and I do, with all my heart. And I thank you also, Tirzah, for your charity to my son. God will reward you in His own good time, 'tis past my power, even were I not a poor old blind woman, living on sufferance in another's house."

"Nay, nay, Gertrude!" broke in Margaret, "say not so. 'Tis your own house—doubt it not. Cedric but holds it for greater security."

The Dame smiled sweetly: "I am well chidden, Margaret, for my murmuring, I have wanted for naught since the Franklin's coming. There be no reason for complaint."

Dame Margaret was too moved to make any reply; she hid her face in her hands. Tirzah rose suddenly:

"I must go now. You have all in readiness, Mistress Etheldreda?"

"Ay, Tirzah. Bid my brother not to fear, the chapel is ready for him yet, for fear of disappointment I have delayed to set it forth. The windows will be darkened, there is but one thing unrehearsed. Whom shall we leave to guard against surprise?"

"Nay, I know not; unless it be Andrew, the gardener's boy."

"I like him not."

"Etheldreda!" it was Dame Gertrude who spoke.

"'Tis true, mother. I like him not, nor trust him. There be a shifty look in his eyes and he doth ever appear to be doing things by stealth."

"You lack in charity, daughter."

"Yet not in truth, mother."

"Peace! I will have no more of it. Shame, Etheldreda!" To the gypsy: "Be it Andrew, Tirzah: we owe him that much reparation; and, Etheldreda, strive after a better mind. 'Tis but a small soul that sees evil in a poor boy's gait. Were't even so, charity is to be observed at any cost."

The girl did not speak. Dame Margaret flushed a little, then she laid her hand gently on the Dame's arm:

"Nay, sister. Methinks prudence be a virtue also, my niece spoke not of uncharity, but of caution. God wots! we need it in these days. Pray you forgive her."

"There be nothing for me to forgive, Margaret. I have chidden the child, 'twas my duty so to do, the young are ever thoughtless."

"Yet, mayhap, she was right."

"You too, Margaret! Nay, sister, let's trust all that to God. He knows all and that which He permits is best."

Dame Margaret was silenced but not convinced. Tirzah was deep in conversation with Etheldreda, Walter had disappeared, there were sounds as of a hammer busily at work in the loft,

"I must needs return the way I came, Mistress Etheldreda," urged Tirzah. "My cousin waits for me, and, if I returned not openly, 'twould be a mystery to set a spy on the track of another." She gave them farewell. Dame Gertrude detained her for a moment.

"If you would like it, I will give you my name to-night," she said.

"'Tis the very name I would have chosen," she replied.

"Then you will take it—to please your god-mother. Farewell, Tirzah! pray for me. And now I will rest me for I am old and I would not be tired to-night."

As soon as it was dark Father Franklin stole into the Hall. He had chosen not to use the passage for this time, it was at best but a rough road and the air, on account of its length, was extremely bad in places. He purposed to make shafts to ventilate it as soon as he could but these would have to be carefully placed in order to avoid attracting attention. He went straight to the loft to look at the improvised chapel and arrange for a few minor details. The windows were shuttered and covered with heavy velvet hangings to insure against a light being seen from without. Etheldreda had arranged pieces of tapestry and embroideries over the tall presses that stood against the wall and they formed a background for the altar. With some little trouble Walter had extracted the altar stone, which had remained unmolested from its place in the closed chapel below, and inserted it in an opening that he had made

for it in the top panel of the oak chest. It was covered now with a fair linen cloth and on it were placed the silver crucifix and candlesticks taken from their hiding place in one of the empty chests. Father Franklin looked a little anxious as he surveyed the preparations.

"'Tis somewhat risky, Etheldreda. In case of surprise you will find it difficult to hide all those things."

"'Tis a great occasion, Harold. 'Tis not every day in England that a soul comes into its inheritance. Tirzah is happy to-night. She will be gratified and I have a plan for explaining this display of stuff. Did you see Andrew at the gate?" she added irrelevantly.

"Andrew? The new boy? Yes, he was there, Etheldreda; yet I came not by the gate. Something bade me be cautious and so I crept through the hole in the wall at the back of the shrubbery and crossed the lawn in the shelter of the hedge. 'Twas a sudden fancy, yet I followed it."

She gave a great sigh of relief: "I am glad, Harold. I was fearful of Andrew. I must tell you—mother scolded me roundly because I said that I liked him not, nor trusted him for that he had stealthy ways and a shifty eye. She chided me for want of charity, yet, I cannot help thinking that in this case prudence were the greater virtue."

Father Franklin looked startled: "Why put him at the gate? 'Tis not well to run risks in these days. Are any of the neighbors to be here to-night?"

"There was no time to summon them, Harold—and," she dropped her voice almost to a whisper, "I fear that there be a spy at hand. I have felt it for some days, since before the Franklin went away; so, for to-night we'll not take any risks."

"And the passage. I have heard of it but have never seen this end of it. It might be as well if you show it to me now that we are alone."

She took him to the improvised screen of chests placed one on top of another and showed him the trap door and the spring that worked it from the outside. The screen served a double purpose for she had arranged it as a vestry. That gave also an additional security to the secret for strangers who might be present would think that the priest had but retired to unvest when already he would have been in safe hiding, and they could never betray what they did not know.

Father Franklin had decided to baptize Tirzah in the evening. The ceremony would then be entirely private, for no one, save the godmother, Dame Margaret and her son, and Etheldreda would be present. There was good reason for the secrecy for it was death to the priest to reconcile a convert, were he discovered, and fines, torture and imprisonment for the assistants. Therefore none of the household were informed of the reception which took place very quietly after supper when the servants were still busy below stairs and the Hall was not yet closed for the night. Thus the gypsy was not seen by any one save the few concerned in the ceremony.

For greater precaution there was but one light

that served the double purpose of showing respect to the sacred rite and of enabling the priest to read the office. Etheldreda had posted herself at the head of the ladder to guard against surprise. Dame Gertrude knelt by the side of Tirzah while she repeated her profession of Faith. When the time came for the baptism she performed her duties of sponsor with the help of Dame Margaret who guided her hands when necessary. Father Franklin's voice trembled once or twice, he had not become used to his mother's blindness as Etheldreda had, and it touched him to the heart. She was perfectly unconscious of that and only anxious to perform her part fittingly. No thought of danger either for herself or for her son marred the joy of her soul just then, her heart was too full of thanksgiving. Dame Margaret caught her breath when she saw the rapt look on her face and the flush of happiness that transfigured it.

"Mary Gertrude, I baptize thee, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."—It was done. Tirzah the gypsy was made a child of God—a member of the Church. Her hand trembled as she held the light that Father Franklin gave into her keeping, and the words of office came to her as from afar off:

"Mary Gertrude, go in peace, and the Lord be with you." For a few moments they all knelt in thanksgiving. None of them could have spoken just then. The priest was the first to rise.

"Good-night," he said, "God bless you all. I shall say Mass an hour after midnight—if the Lord permits," he added as an afterthought.

There was always a doubt in matters of that kind in the days of "Good Queen Bess."

Etheldreda assisted Dame Gertrude down the ladder and to her chamber. It was a difficult matter for the old lady even had she not been blind, but she made light of it all and bade them "good-night" again softly, when she reached the foot of the ladder.

Walter insisted on giving his room to Father Franklin that he might rest for a few hours. The priest hesitated.

"Nay, Father. I be young and can sleep very well on the rushes in the Hall for once. 'Twould be as well not to have an extra bed prepared, in case of surprise."

"You are all alike," said the priest uneasily, "all of you, except Etheldreda, you seem to fear a surprise to-night. I have not felt so safe for months—I might say for years. We are all good Catholics here; Cedric is away and could scarcely return under five hours even if he had word of this; and then, there is the old passage way that none knows of save Etheldreda and I. What is there to fear? Even our nearest neighbors are Catholics.

"That is all true, Father. Yet Etheldreda be uneasy likewise. She—" he hesitated, "she liketh not the porter, who is in sooth but a boy and not like to show overmuch wit should he be questioned."

The young priest looked grave: "I like not to hear a lad's honesty questioned. Yet mayhap 'twould be more prudent to assemble the house-

hold and set another at the gate. What think you, Walter?"

"That you are right, Father. It shall be done, for the Dame, my mother, thinks as you do, but she forbore to insist lest she might wound Aunt Gertrude."

He hurried to the Hall where Dame Margaret had preceded him. She had much to think of and she drew forth her embroidery frame. Walter came lightly down the stairs and threw himself down on the low stool that served her to rest her feet upon. She turned to him and saw the anxiety in his face.

"You are troubled, my son," she said, leaning toward him tenderly.

"Ay, mother. Father Franklin shares our anxiety anent the boy Andrew. He counsels that we assemble the household, and set another watch—one more tried."

"Did he so? I deemed that Etheldreda was in the right; yet I cared not to interfere. Bid the servants assemble here quietly, Walter. Poor Gertrude! after all I am Cedric's wife, and mistress here—I would not that she knew that I say so, poor woman. Yet the duty of keeping my house and my guests in such safety as I may, is clear to me. Go, Walter! Bid them come gently; I would not have the Dame's slumbers disturbed."

They came. There were not so many of them; not a score all told and she asked Michael to see if they were all present. He called their names, the women first, beginning with old Hilda and ending with Dame Margaret's tirewoman, who

was the latest comer. After that he called over the men. They all responded until he came to the last—Andrew, the gardener's boy who had been set at the gate, was missing—.

"And he is not at the gate?" questioned Dame Margaret.

"No, Lady. The gate be left unlocked and the boy be not there."

"Then look for him and bring him to me," she said quietly. "Good-night, my friends," she added calmly, "go rest yourselves and be in the old loft an hour after midnight." They filed out silently and respectfully. A few moments later Michael returned with a rueful countenance:

"There be no sign of him, Dame Franklin. And there be two of the Franklin's horses missing. I never liked the boy—yet I looked not to see him play traitor."

"Traitor—!" she half rose from her seat but fell back into it with an exceeding bitter cry. "Traitor!—ay, so was Cedric."

For a moment the old man stood in silence. From his heart he pitied the Dame, who had ever been most gentle and unassuming since her husband had brought her to Ethendene. Now, when he had a fleeting glimpse of her torn heart his own went out to her in sympathy

"I'll take the gate myself, for to-night," he said gently.

She looked up swiftly, an intense relief in her eyes. "Ay, do so, Michael, for indeed I fear lest more of sorrow come to this house." She caught her breath and held up her head to listen as she

spoke. The clock at the end of the hall chimed eleven.

It was very still—she heard some unaccustomed sounds above her head without heeding them for the old man spoke but one word:

“Listen!”

There was a sound of galloping horses on the road—in the courtyard—a clatter of feet—and then the door was thrown open suddenly to admit Cedric Franklin.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE GREY OF THE DAWN.

CEDRIC stepped into the light and looked around. There was no one there save Margaret and the house steward. She rose quickly and came to meet him—but no words came to her lips, her throat was curiously dry. Cedric gave a rough little laugh.

"You did not expect me, Margaret?" he said, eyeing her confusion.

"You said that you would go to London, perchance, before returning," she replied. There was a trembling in her voice that he noted. She looked very childish, she was so small; the sort of a woman who seems to be made for petting, and fine clothes, and a care-free life.

"I changed my mind, Margaret; which is a man's privilege. Where's Gertrude?"

"She be gone to rest this hour past, Cedric."

"And the children?"

She laughed aloud: "Etheldreda would scarce recognize herself by that name, Cedric, and as for Walter—he be a man in mind, if not in stature."

"He be just like you, Margaret. But trifling apart, I would know where they are."

"I—I know not, Cedric, they be perchance dancing," she suggested desperately.

"Ay, I'll warrant you they're dancing—or at some other mischief. I tell you I'll not have them left to themselves like this. And it grows late; 'tis time you retired, Dame."

"Nay, Cedric, I felt no inclination to sleep and my embroidery interested me somewhat—and the time passed."

"Let your embroidery be covered, Dame," he said with a glance at the big frame where it stood before her chair.

"Ay, now. I thought of retiring when you came. I did but give Michael his orders for the night."

"What orders?"

"To keep the gate. It seems that the boy hath strayed from his post and taken two of the horses with him. Michael found the gate unlocked and came to report the matter to me." She looked at him anxiously, thinking that the boy would have returned with him.

Cedric turned to the steward who stood waiting. "Get you to bed, Margaret; I'll settle this matter," he said, dismissing her with a wave of his hand.

"Good-night, Michael!" she said as she passed the man. He saw the terror in her eyes and strove to reassure her:

"Good-night, Dame!" he answered cheerfully, "belike we'll find the foolish boy, and the horses, too, ere long."

"Peace!" thundered the Franklin.

Michael looked his surprise, but he said nothing.

"Come with me," continued Cedric, "there be something amiss in the house to-night and I must make the rounds." He led the way up the stairs. All was quiet in the rooms that opened off the stone corridor; he could hear the gentle breathing of his sister-in-law as he passed her door. The rest was silence. He came at last to the ladder that led to the loft. The shutter had been hastily replaced so that no light was visible but he could hear voices in earnest conversation.

Michael had tried to divert his attention from the place, yet not too pointedly, for fear of arousing suspicion. The Franklin stole softly up the ladder and raised the shutter. Michael was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. The voices ceased suddenly as Cedric's head appeared above the floor. He thrust the shutter away and strode into the loft, Michael following him closely.

Margaret was there and Etheldreda and Walter. The girl was attired in white with a sweeping train, and her bright hair crowned with a coronal of autumn foliage. It appeared that she had been dancing for Walter still held his lute.

Dame Margaret slipped from them to her husband's side: "Chide them not, Cedric," she said, "I have just been scolding them roundly for their frivolity. Methinks the time passed quickly and they scarcely heeded the hours as they played." She laid her little hand on his sleeve coaxingly. The action recalled other, and happier days. He was touched—yet he was fearful too, and looked

around him, as though expecting to see something startling in the loft.

They had contrived to hide the altar and its furnishings and to disarrange the hangings and tapestries so that it seemed that they had but ransacked the old chests and presses for their play.

"Come, come! 'tis over late for your mummeries," he said sharply, "to your chamber, Etheldreda, and you too, Walter. Dame, you waste too much of your beauty sleep to-night." She smiled at him bravely; he saw the effort that smile cost her and it irritated him. "Nay, then, there be naught to smile at, that I can see. I'll send Walter to college, and that right soon; 'tis time he learned to play the man. This playing of the lute for an idle wench to dance is little worth."

He strode to the ladder and stood aside letting them precede him. Then taking the lantern he had brought, he followed, only waiting to see them disappear in the gloom of the unlighted corridor before going on to the Hall below where he sat beside the embers of the dying fire.

He was perplexed and uneasy. He had not seen Andrew, who was evidently missing, and under some little suspicion, he could see that much. The thing was a mystery and the longer he thought about it, the harder of solution it appeared to be. He gave it up at last, for the night at any rate—yet he had been sure of the message that had come to him though he had scarce seen the bearer of it in the fading light.

He had been idling by the wharf at Fordwich

when a stranger had accosted him. For a moment he had been startled, but something in the man's manner claimed his attention. The news was explicit and detailed. He told of Father Franklin's intended visit to the Hall for the purpose of saying Mass there and warned him of danger to come did he not hasten home.

There had been something familiar in the stranger's gait, yet he could not recollect having seen him before. The whole thing puzzled him for he had found nothing that might not have been had he been at Ethendene himself. Dame Gertrude in bed and asleep; his wife sitting alone with her embroidery; the two young folks dancing! Surely these things did not wear an aspect of tragedy such as the fearful assembling of Catholics for forbidden rites would have worn. And—as for the priest—well, he knew better than to visit his old home at any rate, where there was a clear certainty of running his head into the noose.

The fire died out at last. The Franklin was tired with his ride, his head fell forward upon his breast and he slept.

It was dark and chill when he awoke. There was a gusty wind blowing into the Hall, and a subdued confusion as of muffled voices without. For a moment he listened—the champing of a horse's bit came to him and with it, the consciousness of someone without who was speaking in low tones. Then a lantern was flashed in his face suddenly—so that he started up:

"What do you here?" he asked sharply, hardly awake as yet.

"Nay, Franklin. I knew not it was you. I thought you miles away. I crave your pardon—yet I have my duty to perform."

"Your duty!—nay—speak out, man! I came home to-night and sat wearied by the fire where it seems that I fell asleep. Methinks I do but dream still."

"Nay, you dream not, Franklin. Do you know me?" He threw open his coat as he spoke, revealing a pursuivant's badge beneath it. The Franklin held out his hand:

"Why! Thomas Sherwood! I knew you not. 'Tis long since you and I foregathered. Yet, tell me, how fares it with you? and whence come you? This is scarce the hour for a fashionable visit." The man had turned slightly aside, evidently he found his errand more difficult than he had expected.

"I pray you take it not ill that I do my duty," he said stiffly. Cedric caught his breath suddenly—he began to be afraid.

"Nay, do your duty!" he said with assumed cordiality though his voice fluttered curiously in his throat.

"Then, Franklin, read this. Or shall I read it to you? The light is not over good—'tis a warrant, signed in due form by a magistrate, you will observe, permitting me to search the house named Ethendene."

"To search *my* house! Nay, Thomas Sherwood, this is an insult! Search? and wherefore? Do I look like a thief, a rogue, a sheepstealer? Faugh!

the words choke me—they stick in my throat. By whose order is this outrage?"

"By the order of the Queen's Grace."

"The Queen's Grace! Why 'twas she herself who ceded the estates to me with the house and all the privileges of the Franklins. Marry, sir, 'tis an abuse—or a mistake."

The pursuivant laid his hand on Cedric's shoulder persuasively. The Franklin looked at him from under his shaggy brows—there was fear in his eyes—and defiance—and hatred—but most of all fear.

"Come, come! Franklin, 'tis but a matter of form. The Queen's Grace knows full well that you are her loyal subject. She knows that you have taken the oath and conformed—you did conform, did you not?" Cedric bowed his head; he could not have spoken then. "This warrant," went on the pursuivant, tapping the folded paper with the back of his finger tips, "gives me the right to search: and not that alone neither, it *forces* upon me the unpleasant duty of searching a friend's house. Come, make it as little difficult as may be. I have men without; say that I may leave them there. I will, and you will yourself guide me through the house."

Half dazed with the suddenness of the visitation, Cedric passed his word. Sherwood posted a man at the foot of each staircase and set a sentry at each of the outer doors. Then he made the circuit of the Great Hall tapping the walls here and there and peering up the wide chimney.

Then he signified his intention of visiting the corridor above.

"The ladies are sleeping," he objected, "my sister-in-law be old and blind, I should be loth to affright her."

"Nevertheless my duty be plain. I must visit every room in the house and make sure—"

"Yes! Make sure of what?" broke in the Franklin.

"That one, Harold Franklin, otherwise called, 'Father Franklin,' a seminary priest, be not harbored under your roof."

"And this to me!" fairly shrieked Cedric, "to me, who have proved my faith and loyalty to the Queen's Grace! to me, who have spared not mine own brother, nor his son, in her service. Sir! you insult me."

"Tush Tush! Franklin. These words avail not. Lead on or I shall be compelled to order your arrest. I do not believe that the priest is here for you are too—too—careful, a man to harbor him—that is sure. But others of your family may be less wary—the young for instance—might easily be led astray by compassion."

"Come, then," returned Cedric sullenly, "since you will not respect either age and infirmity, or innocence, I'll go with you." He tried Etheldreda's door as he spoke. It was locked and the girl did not hear him at once. Sherwood grew impatient—

"'Tis but a trick to gain time," he said, "knock louder, Franklin." Then, as he heard the girl stirring within: "Open, in the Queen's name!"

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then Etheldreda came out of the room and closed the door behind her.

"Hush!" she said, "you disturb the Lady, my mother. What means this, Uncle Cedric? What means it?"

She had thrown a dark cloak about her and drawn the hood over her head, in the flickering light of the torch carried by Sherwood she seemed even taller than she was. Sherwood interposed:

"'Tis nothing, Mistress Franklin. All is well, for I am assured that the priest be not hidden here, but I must e'en search your chamber; 'tis my painful duty."

"Search my chamber, sir? and wherefore? Uncle Cedric, why do you allow this outrage?"

"Nay, Etheldreda, 'tis by the Queen's order. They fear that Father Franklin, the priest, is in the house."

"Nay then go look for him elsewhere—and yet—if you must, you must—but suffer me to wake my mother gently, she be old, and blind and the shock of this—this outrage—might kill her else."

"Be speedy then, Mistress. We waste time." The girl turned back into the room. Dame Franklin was already awake. She had heard the disturbance and guessed only too well what it all meant.

"Speak gently, child. 'Tis foolish to anger him and make another enemy. Belike he will be gentle. Admit him now—resistance be of no avail."

She lay back wearily upon her pillow; she had

passed through a like trial in the same house before when the Franklin had been carried off to the prison that he had never left again in life. It was but one more indignity, besides she was assured that Harold was safe for Etheldreda had contrived to whisper that he had already escaped.

Thomas Sherwood was no common pursuivant, he was gentler than most of his profession and contented himself with a cursory examination of the two rooms, but in passing the hangings, he prodded them with the point of his sword and made sundry lunges with it under the beds. Cedric's lip curled yet he dared not speak his thought. Sherwood compelled Dame Margaret to rise also and then they visited Walter's room. The boy was so evidently fast asleep that the visitor did not even try to rouse him, especially as one glance around the room assured him that no person could possibly be hidden there.

The servants were not unmolested, from Michael to the youngest, they were all submitted to the same search. Cedric was beginning to hope that the inquisitors would not try the loft. For some reason his mind misgave him about it. He could not have told why. The pursuivant had seen the ladder however:

"Where does that lead?" he asked and before the Franklin had time to reply he was already at the top.

"Ah! Ha!" he cried, "this begins to look something like it. What have we here? a lute? and here? ladies gowns! nay, they're all right. What's

in these chests?" he opened one and found it empty, "nay, these be not *all* empty of a surety!"

The Franklin waited grimly while the pursuivant went from one to another with no better result. Sherwood began to be impatient. He was not a cruel-minded man and wished Cedric no harm, yet the Ethendene estates tempted him sorely.

"Mark well that man!" the Queen had said to Sherwood, who had chanced to witness Cedric's leavestaking and departure from Greenwich Palace, where the court was in residence at the time. "'Tis a mean soul, and a cowardly. We trust him not." And Sherwood, in bowing over the hand that Elizabeth had extended to him, had promised himself to secure Cedric's estates for his own at the first opportunity, if it might be done without any unseemly exhibition of greed. He knew that the Queen preferred always that appearances should be respected if possible.

He had set forth in haste when a whisper of the priest's presence at Ethendene had reached him, only pausing at the house of a magistrate to have the necessary warrant signed, and after all his trouble and the loss of his night's rest, to find nothing was intolerable.

He gave a vicious kick to the pile of dresses and hangings that were scattered over the empty boxes where he himself had thrown them during his search. They fell in a disordered heap on the very spot he sought, and he little knew that he himself had helped more to guard the secret of the loft than all the plans of Etheldreda and

her cousin. Thus, Divine Providence oftentimes makes tools of those who work for evil ends.

For a while longer he examined the room carefully by the light of his torch, tapping the walls here and there for places of concealment and finding nothing.

Cedric watched in silence, with folded arms and an attempt to appear unconcerned, yet he was rebelling against the tyranny of this visit all the time. He had thought that he had made his position so sure, that he, at any rate, would have gone unsuspected. Remembrance came to him like a fresh blow on a sore spot. He had furnished proofs of loyalty even at the expense of his own brother's life. That he should be suspected of harboring a priest—and that priest the nephew whom he had denounced, was intolerable. It was a blow to his sense of security that unmanned him.

The pursuivant expressed himself satisfied after a while and they descended to the Great Hall. The day was dawning, a grey chill day with leaden clouds that seemed to rest on the Hall and the woods like a presage of evil. The household was already astir and the Franklin issued orders for the entertainment of the pursuivant and his men but he refused to sit at the table with them.

Sherwood refused curtly. He was by no means pleased at the non-success of his raid and not disposed to accept what he felt to be an insult from the Franklin.

"Nay, Franklin, I must be going," he said. "I

pray you, think no less of my friendship for this visit. Queen's commands leave a poor officer no discretion."

"Nay, Sir Thomas, I know that you mean no ill to me or mine, but 'tis pity that my loyalty be so little appreciated by Her Grace."

"Pity, indeed!" agreed the pursuivant, "yet after all, most of all pity that you meddled in the Ethendene affairs. The late Franklin was a worthy man who lived in peace with his neighbors and troubled no one. He might have weathered the storm, and no harm done. 'Twas pity, man! mistaken zeal! and must have cost you somewhat to boot."

Cedric's brow darkened yet he made no reply, indeed Sherwood gave him no chance, for he had flung himself into the saddle and turned his horse's head to the road before the Franklin had time to draw his breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMORSE.

DAME MARGARET lay awake upon her bed. Since the rude interruption of her slumbers she had not slept. Through what seemed interminable hours of darkness she lay listening to the foot-steps of the pursuivant and his men as they tramped in and out of the rooms, respecting no privacy, assured of his right by possession of the warrant of the Queen who was herself a woman. She heard him visit Walter's room and breathed more freely when he went away again. She thought that the loft would scarcely attract him. She was ignorant as yet of the methods of priest-hunters at their work; there were no newspapers in those days. Then she had heard foot-steps over her head and knew that he had penetrated to the heart of the secret. She strove to take comfort in remembering how well Etheldreda had contrived to hide the traces of the priest's presence. She even smiled once as she recalled how they had hoodwinked Cedric, for the disordered loft, with the dancing girl and the boy musician had not indeed suggested the solemnity of persecuted people worshipping in stealth.

Her mind was at rest concerning the priest. He had gone at the first intimation of danger, conveyed to him by Tirzah who was ever on the watch. For the sake of his mother, and the rest of the household, quite as much as for his own, he had retired by the secret passage leaving to Etheldreda and her cousin the disposal of the altar furnishings. The sacred vessels belonging to the closed chapel had been stowed away in those old chests amidst the gowns that had been the remnants of happier days and it was only during the past few hours that they had contrived to remove them to a hiding place at the further end of the secret passage, which was at some distance from the house. Thus the pursuivant's visit could not have occurred at a better time. Had he made his search even a month before he would doubtless have found and carried off the vestments and other treasures that had lain so long hidden under the dust and spider-webs of the old loft.

As it was, he found a sleeping household and a disordered room—that was all—unless?—

In spite of herself and her efforts to be calm the anxiety would return, and when the grey light of early dawn crept slowly across her casement she rose, thankful to be up and doing something once more.

It was still dark. She heard sounds of departure, and the confused murmur of men's voices below—then the trotting of horses as the pursuivant and his men rode away. She was dressed by that time and slipped softly from her

chamber to that of her niece. Her soft tap, and "May I come in, Etheldreda?" brought the girl to the door. She also was fully clad; she had been weeping but the faint light concealed the traces of her tears from her aunt's sharp eyes.

"I give you, good-morrow," she said, speaking low and bending down to kiss Dame Margaret tenderly, "you have not slept?"

"Nay, dear. How could I? And the Dame, your mother?"

"She sleeps peacefully. She feared for Harold for a time, but I was able to assure her that he was away long since and then, when she heard the pursuivant and mine uncle come from the loft, she knew that all must be well and fell asleep. Poor mother! I fear me her strength will not long withstand the ceaseless anxiety of her life. She be so sweetly submissive that it is oft hard to realize how much she suffers. But what news, Aunt Margaret? Have you heard aught?"

"Nay, child, I have but just crept from my chamber. They have gone and your uncle tarries below; I may not stay long lest he come in search of me. We must not seem to confer together over much lest we give cause for suspicion."

"I would that we knew what had chanced to Andrew," said the girl under her breath.

"I know not what to think, Etheldreda. The mystery deepens. That some one, a friend mayhap, warned Cedric, is certain. Yet for the pursuivant's visit methinks 'tis harder to discover a reason."

"He be of the Queen's religion, Aunt, yet he

hath ever appeared to be friendly. I mind me that he oftentimes hunted in Ethendene Park when I was but a little girl and he was plain Thomas Sherwood. My father esteemed him also as an upright man. He was a Catholic in those days, I verily believe."

"Most like. These changes are all new. Twenty years since there were but few of the new religion, but those few were of reputable kind who had inherited it from their parents. In the late reign they were at a disadvantage for Queen Mary was ever a zealous Catholic. God rest her!" she added piously.

"Poor Queen! she had a sad life of it, Aunt Margaret. The longer I live the less I value life; 'tis all sorrow and anxiety in these times."

"Nay, courage, child! You are not yourself to-day; the young cannot afford to lose their rest—and—let me see," turning her to the light, "you have been weeping, nay, deny it not, 'tis no marvel; but for Dame Gertrude's sake you must be of better cheer. There! no more—" for her words of sympathy had brought the girl's tears back again. For a moment, she bent her forehead to Dame Margaret's shoulder and she suffered them to flow freely. Neither spoke and the Dame knew that it was better for the girl's grief and terror to find its natural outlet. Etheldreda raised her head at last:

"See how weak I am," she said with a wan smile. "I should be stronger methinks, with so many good examples about me. God knows that I need them all; therefore, I doubt not, He hath

put them there. Sometimes, Dame Margaret, I be afraid, knowing the weakness, lest I be tempted to betray anyone."

The Dame started: "How? betray? Etheldreda! What fancy's this? Franklins betray not!"

"No. And think not I'd do it easily. Yet, be-think you, Aunt, how other women have been tried—prison—the rack!—and worse!"

"Content you, child, you be not called to that, and say, for argument's sake, you were—rest assured you'll ne'er be tried beyond your strength. 'Tis God's own promise."

"Yes—I know—but how?"

"Listen, Etheldreda! I know not how—but younger girls than you—and more tender—have triumphed over worse."

"True! yet, an they hurt Harold, or the Dame my mother, 'twould be a fiery trial."

"Think no more on it; 'tis waste of time and tears. If the day comes 'twill bring its needed strength, and it may *never* come; yet, for the dread of it pray daily, 'twill not then find you unprepared."

"You have given me fresh courage, Aunt Margaret. I thank you! But, for the nonce, if we might only have tidings of Harold—and Andrew."

"Nay, child. All in its turn. No news is good news—patience!"

"Ay! always 'patience,' Aunt. First—last—and always—'Patience!' The hardest thing of all when your heart is breaking with anxiety. 'Tis a virtue that may look very like apathy at times—or despair."

"Tut, tut! child. Turn your thoughts to more useful things. Hark! Dame Gertrude stirs—she wakes."

The girl hurried to the bedside. The Dame had raised herself on her elbow.

"Etheldreda! did I hear your voice? Who speaks?"

"'Tis I, Gertrude," answered Franklin's wife. "The storm is over for the present, sister. The pursuivant has gone and has discovered nothing."

"Thank God! Has the day dawned? I fain would rise."

"'Tis day, mother, but early as yet. You have not slept much—rest you a little while longer."

"Nay, child, I will rise in a few moments. Margaret! is there no news? How fared the Franklin, and you, and Walter?"

"The pursuivant went but now. Cedric tarries below—there seems to be no news of Andrew, and Harold was away before the search began. That is all. If I hear more I'll tell you at once. Now I must go for Cedric must not see us talking overmuch amongst ourselves." She slipped quietly from the room.

Dame Gertrude laid her hand on Etheldreda's, for the girl stood close beside her. "And this was the reason of your masquerade, child. I am well content for I was troubled at the lightness of it. Not that there was aught of wrong in what you did, but I feared that it betokened a lack of serious purpose—and life be ever serious in these days."

"You understand now, mother?"

"Ay! I understand. But tell me, how came you to think of it?"

"'Twas the merest chance, mother. In turning over some of the old presses in the loft we found some of the furnishings of the chapel that had been locked away when it was closed, twelve years ago."

"And you remembered them? You were but five years of age, Etheldreda."

"Yet I remembered them very well. Then, when Uncle Cedric came to Ethendene, they were no longer safe in a press that he might open any day and so I began to devise some means for secreting them."

"You said naught to me."

"'Twas safer not. Had the Franklin asked you of them you knew nothing. Tirzah helped me to dispose of them. At first I put the sacred vessels in the oak chest where I found grandmother's gown. 'Twas the strongest of them all, and I kept the key with me for safety. 'Twas but yesterday that they were removed and Walter fixed the altar stone that he took from the chapel in the lid of the chest. Everything was in safe hiding before Uncle Cedric got upstairs, and the vestments too; even the altar stone was saved. 'Twas a scramble," went on the girl almost gaily, "but 'twas all done when the Franklin came and found us dancing. 'Twas I who danced; Walter but played the lute. Aunt Margaret had hastened up to tell us, 'twas she who helped to tire me while she made shift to scold us for our frivolity. I love her! she be

so gentle and so joyous, and yet, I trow her burden is no light one."

"Ay! poor woman. 'Tis far better to know those we love unfortunate than faulty, and I think, to be Cedric's wife be no slight misfortune."

"She hath Walter to console her, mother."

"He is a noble-hearted child. Pray Heaven he be not spoiled. Cedric was ever obstinate and set in his own way; sometimes I tremble for what may befall Walter."

"And wherefore? methinks he hath the makings of a man, nay, he be more a man than his father now—and he hath ambitions for lofty things."

"He told you?"

"Ay, mother. He was surprised into it. We were in the loft together, full of my plans for masquerade when first he came. Quite unawares I stumbled on his secret. He told you too?"

"Nay, child, 'twas Margaret told me. She be a brave woman, for all her childlike ways and her small stature."

"God pity them! I see only sorrow for them both," said the girl pensively, as she proceeded to assist her mother to dress.

She had noticed of late that the Dame grew less and less able to help herself; that morning her mother appeared unusually feeble but she thought of it as the result of the night's disturbance and was not alarmed. They went downstairs after a while and sat in the Great Hall, Dame Margaret at her spinning and Etheldreda at her needle.

Cedric came in about noon. He was strangely

haggard, his once fair hair was streaked with gray and his eyes were dark and sunken. He stooped painfully also, and there was a furtive look about him as though he shrank from observation. Etheldreda noted it all yet she scarcely comprehended it. He did not speak for some time and they respected his evident desire to be left alone.

His wife glanced at him from time to time; the conviction was growing upon her that he feared something or some person, yet exactly what, or whom she could not imagine. After all, Thomas Sherwood's visit had done more good than harm seeing that he had found nothing amiss, and she began to wonder if it was remorse of conscience that troubled him and was half inclined to offer him her sympathy. She had a sympathetic soul, this brave little woman who could so royally forget herself and her wrongs for others. After all she was his wife, she argued, and it was her duty to share his sorrows. Her marriage vows had been no empty form of words, she had meant them intensely on that fair spring day when she had placed her hand in Cedric Franklin's at the foot of the altar, and they had sought together the blessing of the Church. She sighed involuntarily as she recalled it, for the moment she had forgotten all else, it was as though the long years of trial that had intervened had been blotted out. She saw the altar ablaze with lights, the curling incense, the venerable priest who had married them—it was but as yesterday—until she remembered that the altar had since been desecrated,

the priest had perished on the scaffold, the husband who should have taken his stand between her and evil, had become a traitor and a murderer—and for what?—a house and lands! not safety even—she realized that. It was small wonder that she sighed so that Etheldreda looked at her quickly. Dame Margaret was more wont to smile than sigh, but the girl made no remark for Cedric had risen. For a moment he hesitated, then with a furtive look about him he drew his chair nearer to his wife's.

"Margaret!" he said softly.

She started a little as he had broken suddenly on her reverie. "Yes?" she replied. There was a great surprise in her query. He laid his hand on hers as though he would enlist her sympathies:

"Margaret! I fear me we are watched. There be some spy in the house—some enemy I mean—do you follow me?"

"Ay, Cedric, I follow you. I have thought so myself, but who? There is none here whom I could suspect; none who would stoop so low: there is no member of the household whom I do not trust."

"The boy—Andrew?"

"I cannot explain it, Cedric. Methinks the poor lad hath been spirited away. 'Twas not he who warned you?"

"Nay. He warned me not. How could he have known that Sherwood had his raid planned? And it was the same tale had them both fooled; a tale with no truth in it. Yet something tells me that the man who warned me was a friend, Mar-

garet. There was something about him seemed familiar, yet I cannot recall his voice. His face I scarcely saw for it was after sundown and the light near gone. Why did he not come to me openly, seeing that he did me a friendly office? And did he know of Sherwood's intention? To me, the matter wears the semblance of a plot."

She sighed: "Nay, Cedric, I am but a plain woman with no head for mysteries. I pray you pardon me. I cannot help you and I should fear to make matters worse by interfering."

He rose suddenly and went to the window where he stood looking at the greyness without. The heavy clouds still hovered over the Hall and the forest and the air was heavy with moisture though it had not yet begun to rain. He was seriously disturbed, the suspicion, the doubt, the mystery, were telling on him. His conscience was uneasy likewise. Uneasy! nay, it was a torture to him. Remorse gnawed into his soul; remorse for the treachery and cowardice that had brought him to the betrayal of his brother and the denouncing of his nephew, but never a thought of repentance for the Faith he had denied. It was all regret—useless, unavailing regret, for the depth to which he had fallen, and a cutting, burning suspicion that other men despised him as a coward and a traitor. They were no better than himself, but they were the companions he had chosen and their contempt was hard to bear. He had been so sure that the Queen trusted him—she had smiled on him once, and that smile had contented him strangely—it was well that it had

done so, for it was dearly bought. Now, all sense of security was scattered to the winds—the world was in confusion about him—he was at a dead-lock.

Walter came in a trifle noisily. Margaret held up her hand warningly, but the Franklin turned suddenly to the lad:

“See that that woman goes! and quickly,” he said. The boy was mystified for a moment, then his eyes followed the direction of his father’s glance:

“’Tis Tirzah!” he said, “she be here with herbs for Etheldreda—I forget what—she craves admission.”

“Herbs!” exclaimed Cedric contemptuously, “she seeks news more like. Nay then, let her come in an you will; ’tis best perchance to humor these people seeing that the time be not good for the making of enemies. Come, Walter! We’ll leave the ladies to discuss herbs and simples and fill their medicine chest with noxious potions for sick men, a game of bowls will serve us to drive dull care away.” He strode to the door and passed out, nearly knocking down the gypsy in passing. Walter followed him quickly, with a glance of intelligence at Dame Margaret, and disappeared behind the shrubbery in the direction of the bowling green.

“Good-morrow, ladies!” cried Tirzah, “here be the herbs I gathered for your Mistress Etheldreda. Here’s gentian, and vervain, and rosemary, and tansy, and thyme, and dandelion! all I could get now. Those be all you asked for!”

"Ay, Tirzah, I thank you. But see! Dame Gertrude would speak with you."

The gypsy went forward, and sank on her knees at Dame Franklin's feet. "I give you good-morrow, lady," she said softly, "and I bring you a message from one you know of."

"From—?"

"Hush! there be ears that hear secrets, lady—and tell them—I know not whose they be, but I bid you beware. The message that I bring bids you be of good heart for the one you fear for is safe, albeit he be not able to go abroad just now."

"But he be indeed safe, Tirzah? No evil hath befallen him?"

"He be safe, lady—and in my care," she said proudly. "He wants for naught, save only a free life, he says, and liberty to go about his Master's work. He complains not, he bade me tell you that, but he wearies for a sight of you and for the power to help. For the rest, he will not be a prisoner long."

Etheldreda had seated herself on the stool at her mother's feet to hear the gypsy's message, for she spoke in a low tone that no one save the three ladies could possibly have overheard their discourse.

"He be at the cave still?" she asked.

"Nay, Mistress Etheldreda; it be too cold and damp and I have found him a better and a safer place—yet I tell you not where, for greater safety."

"I would go to him, Tirzah."

"And be his undoing? Nay, lady, rest content, he be safer as it is. An he want for aught I'll tell you. The passage way be closed also. The entrance was not found?"

"Nay, Tirzah. And yet the pursuivant must have walked over it. When I slipped upstairs a while since to see if aught had chanced, I nearly laughed I was so merry. Bethink you, Tirzah, he had scattered all those fineries about and there was one great heap that covered the very spot he sought." Tirzah looked up suddenly—

"Methought I heard a footstep in the stone corridor—" she whispered.

They held their breaths to listen—for a moment all was still, then a slow, soft step passed down the corridor and was lost in the distance. The closing of a door a long way off seemed to connect itself with the sound as it echoed softly through the silent Hall.

"God shield us!" ejaculated Dame Gertrude, crossing herself fervently.

"Amen! responded Dame Margaret. "I would give a great deal to know who that might be."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE WOOD.

CEDRIC stopped suddenly. He had come to the bowling green but he had evidently forgotten the game that he had proposed. Walter was still a few paces in the rear, for the Franklin had walked on without waiting for him, and so swiftly that the lad had some difficulty in coming up with him. He looked a trifle impatiently at the boy's small stature.

"'Tis time we made a man of you, Walter," he said roughly.

Walter flushed. He looked up quickly for he felt that there was something at the back of his father's words. He had been thinking deeply of late and had come to realize that the hour of battle was upon him.

"'Twill do you no harm to walk for a space," went on Cedric, "I fear me you have been too much with the women folk. 'Tis time that you left all such trifling."

"Nay, sir, I trifle not. I assure you that I am faithful at my books. My mother knows that I am well advanced although I have had no tutor but herself."

"Tut, tut! a woman's all very well for babes! You should be free of womanish control by now. Your mother be a good woman, yet she hath a tendency to Romish teachings which be a danger in these days. The like of that be not for you, the heir to Ethendene, and Franklin when I am gone. 'Tis a fair estate and a proud, boy! A fine old house with traditions wellnigh a thousand years of age. Such a house as knows no weaklings; the Franklins be made of stern stuff."

"Ay! I know it, father, and I would be worthy of my name and of my house," answered the boy quietly.

"Spoken like a man, and like a Franklin forsooth! I misjudged you, Walter. I deemed you but soft and womanish; I be glad to be mistaken. Hark you! You are my only son. Your sister died when you were a mere babe. 'Twas a sore blow to your mother. For myself, I sorrowed, yet I had never been anxious for a girl and, seeing the days that be upon us, maybe it was all for the best."

He stopped speaking and resumed his walk, this time in a more leisurely way. They had left the bowling green far behind them and had entered into the strip of woodland that lay between Ethendene and the marsh. The trees were dripping with moisture that they had gathered from the clouds that hung about their tops, the fallen leaves were wet and sodden; Walter felt dispirited and apprehensive, yet it was long since he had seen his father so softened. The Franklin

walked on in silence for some time, then he turned again suddenly to the boy:

"Alack a day!" he cried, "these be sorry times, when a man's enemies be those of his own household. What think you of the boy—Andrew?"

"'Twere hard to know what to think, father. He be missing and it be scarce sportsmanlike to judge him—and he not at hand to defend himself."

"False chivalry!" said Cedric contemptuously. "'Tis a plain case of self-defence. An we slay not our enemy he will destroy us."

"Nevertheless, I like not the argument, father. I would hold every man my friend until he proves himself otherwise."

"And he'd do it too, at every turn. Listen, boy! that's very well as a pretty sentiment, but sentiment ne'er helped a man to hold his own in this world, and in these days we must needs harden our hearts and close our eyes to all tales, save the one that suits our purpose."

"Be that honest, father? Methinks I have misinterpreted my mother's teachings if it be so. 'Tis rank selfishness to my mind—I—I would be otherwise."

"Indeed!" sneered Cedric, "and how—otherwise."

"I would seek to do good to all, to take the side of the weak, to aid those in misfortune, to deal justly, to forget mine own self sometimes for the good of others. That is my thought of what a Franklin might do and be."

"Then he would be unworthy to be a Franklin—being a fool!"

"To be such a fool might be the truest wisdom, father," said the boy pleadingly. His voice trembled a little with his own earnestness.

Cedric walked on moodily. He had come out with a definite purpose and he was no nearer of gaining his end than he had been when he started. The boy walked by his side but his thoughts were far away. The heavy dew clung to the decaying leaves and lay thick in the long moss so that they sank into a pool of water at every step, but the Franklin tramped along silently. His soul was tortured; he had determined to make Walter a help to him and he foresaw another bitter defeat. "A man's enemies are of his own household," he had read the words lately and they seemed to apply to his case just then. First Andrew—then Walter—and before that—long before—his brother the Franklin whom, for envy and cowardice he had delivered. Nay, the very presence of the Franklin's wife and daughter forbade peace to him. Yet, for the fear of his gentle wife, he could not rid himself of them. He kicked savagely at the little toadstools that made points of scarlet amidst the green, as though he would be revenged in some fashion—be the object ever so small and weak. Walter peered up into his face. What he saw there affrighted him and he crossed himself hurriedly. Cedric caught sight of the gesture:

"Stop that foolery!" he cried roughly, "and now that you have brought me to it, I may as well

tell you. The Saturday after next I ride to Fordwich where I stay two or three days. On the Sunday I take the Sacrament in the parish church. Now that you be of age you will accompany me."

Walter stood stock still. The bolt had fallen! For a moment he was at a loss for words in which to reply. Cedric saw the hesitation and deemed that he had gained his point. Already he was congratulating himself on his easy victory when the lad spoke, slowly and deliberately, yet his voice was hoarse and tense.

"I am sorry, father," he said, "that you have asked this. I will obey you in all things else; but this matter affects my conscience. I am not free to accompany you to church, or to receive the Sacrament at the hands of a heretic."

Cedric's face grew livid but he mastered himself sufficiently to answer with apparent calmness: "Your conscience! Nay, boy, you can scarcely yet understand the term. Your conscience, as you call it, seems to permit of your setting your judgment against that of your elders. You do not seem to understand that obedience to parents is the first principle for the young."

"How if the parents give contradictory commands?"

"That can scarcely be."

"I think it can; it seems as though it might be so," replied Walter. A strange peace had taken possession of him, a feeling that nothing mattered, save the one thing for which he was battling. Dame Margaret had foreseen this struggle and

had used the whole weight of her influence to strengthen the boy's character. He knew nothing that might happen to him as the result of his refusal could afflict her as much as the knowledge of his compliance. And, deeper still, he held the claims of the Faith and the good pleasure of his Lord, enshrined in his soul. Something of this showed in his face and smote the father to the heart. He felt humiliated before his young son—but he never faltered in his determination to win the boy's consent to his plan. Evidently force would be of no effect—he tried promises.

"This is doubtless somewhat of a surprise to you, Walter," he said more gently. "I know well what it all means: the shattering of young dreams, for the young are ever idealists; the tearing down of old idols; I know, I have passed through it—'tis a fiery trial. Think not that your father understands not; he knows only too well how it seems when the barriers are rent asunder and the young soul feels itself dragged from its footing. I know it, Walter. Yet see! the flood that passed over me has left me erect and free, sure of my ground and *incapable of return to the restraints and barriers* that formerly hedged me about.

Walter shivered. Was it indeed so? Was the Franklin incapable of return? With all his soul the boy thrust the thought from him; 'twas akin to despair. Cedric's attempted eloquence had but confirmed him in his purpose.

"Nay, father, indeed you have mistaken me. I cannot yield to this request because I may not,

An I would, I cannot for there be nothing on earth can compensate me for the loss of my soul, and I see not how I may save that so I follow not my conscience."

"Consciences may be false, Walter."

"How—false? Father, when they have been formed by Holy Church, in whom dwells the plenitude of the Holy Ghost. Nay; my conscience be not false, father. It be true, and bids me not obey you in this."

"'Honor thy father,' boy. 'Tis very plain, and your conscience not approve this command, it follows that it must be false."

"Hear me once more, father. I honor you more in refusing to obey you than if I did your bidding in this matter. Did I obey you, I should know that you had prevailed against my sense of right and forced me to an act my soul abhorred. Could I revere you then? Give me my way in this, in all things else, pray you command me."

"And your mother, boy! If you refuse to attend the church you place her in jeopardy. They'll call on her to attend, and I know that she'd just as soon open the Gate of Hell and enter in as go to their church. For her sake pause."

"My mother would rather that I died, father. For herself she cares but little; and God is above us all, to help us according to our needs."

"Tush, boy! you will destroy us all with your selfishness. Would you see your aunt, old, blind, who has already passed through so much, clapped

into prison to die of hardships—or your cousins? Come! you profess some friendship for Etheldreda, and I own that she hath fashioned a place for herself in my heart, 'tis a brave girl, and beautiful. I look perchance to see you bring her home to Ethendene as your bride and so bring back the estates into the true line. 'Twould be the undoing of a great wrong that troubles my soul sorely. Have mercy on me, Walter. I be growing old."

The boy flung himself at the Franklin's feet—

"Nay, spare me, father! Indeed, were it ever lawful to do wrong that good might come to pass, then, would your behest lie lightly on my conscience. Yet it be never lawful, and I must still say you nay." In his earnestness he flung his arms about his father's knees. Cedric looked at him once and the boy's likeness to his mother angered him, but he made one last appeal. If that failed he told himself that he would be compelled to take sterner measures, but that must not fail, for if it did he must have compliance if it cost the boy's life. It was not easy for him to hold himself in check and speak mildly, yet for policy's sake he did it.

"Poor lad! I pity you. I guessed not that this matter went so deep—'tis hard for a father to have to play torturer to his own son. You bid me pity you, Walter; think what you ask, what I ask. I beg, nay, I entreat of you to pity *me*. In mortal terror, inspired by some low *demon*—some spawn of Satan—I gave your cousin, the priest, to death. Ay! to death, yet start not; he

be not taken yet—he *will be some day*, unless you help me. Listen, Walter! are you and I seen to frequent the Queen's church at stated times all this will blow over. It will serve to create a sense of security that will be the only possible protection for all at Ethendene. Your mother and aunt, your cousins, will pursue their way unmolested. Nay, you yourself, need but to feign to conform—your body may be at the church, your soul afar off—in Heaven perchance. Think, boy, what you may accomplish by *seeming* to conform. Why! half the world conforms in that way. Not one in a hundred believes in the Queen's religion but 'tis a matter of policy to attend its services."

Walter rose to his feet suddenly: "And if I do this thing, what will it give me?" he asked calmly.

The Franklin was startled: "Give? Nay I understand not; explain yourself, Walter."

"I have but one soul, father. *It has to be saved*. I cannot save it and play traitor to the God who gave it me. Can you dower me with a second soul to do what I please with?"

"A second soul! Nay, boy, trifle not with me. A second soul indeed! 'Tis over hard to have one in these days, an you had two you'd want to save them both—I know you."

Walter smiled. "Nay, father, an you can give me two, I'll let you have one."

"Anger me not—you waste time."

"I would not anger you, father, but the thing you ask is impossible. Even were it sure, that all

the good you foresee would come to pass, and all the evil that has been done might so be undone, satisfied and atoned for, I could not yield to you in this."

"A truce to this foolery! Next Saturday you ride with me, and on the Sunday following I'll carry you to church, and you shall take the sacrament, willy nilly."

"You may carry me to church, father, but you cannot compel me to take the sacrament. 'Tis no sacrament, and I'd refuse it in public."

"A threat! and this to me!" in the heat of his passion he struck out heavily with his closed fist. The boy was standing quietly before him with folded arms and a pleading look in his dark eyes. The blow fell full on his uplifted face and felled him to the ground where he lay insensible. The Franklin kicked him with his foot.

"Get up! get up, I say, Walter." Then, as the lad did not stir, he began to grow afraid and stooped to raise him. The boy's head fell limply over his arm and a warm dark stream trickled over his sleeve and fell across the back of his hand.

"Blood!" he muttered uneasily, "more blood!"

A sudden rustling in a thicket of crimson brambles startled him. He looked up but could see no one, yet he had an unpleasant sensation of being watched. He waited for a moment, then he gathered the boy into his arms and fled with him in the direction of the house. Even as he turned to go a mocking laugh rang through the

wood. There was something demoniacal in the sound—he looked furtively in its direction but could see nothing and when the laugh was repeated he fled in terror.

The Franklin was a strong man and Walter was but slight for his years but it taxed all his powers, unnerved as he was by that fearful laugh, to get as far as the Hall. The boy moaned once and he was anxious to get him into the house and hidden as soon as might be. On the way he thought out a plan to hide the mark of that blow from the boy's mother. He dreaded Dame Margaret's questions more than all. He knew that she would surely guess what had transpired in the wood, even had no living soul been witness of the blow that had stricken her son. And of that he was somewhat fearful, though who it could be puzzled him.

There was but one place that suggested itself to him as a likely spot in which to secrete the boy. The old loft seemed the very place for his purpose, he could hide him there and the sense of imprisonment might also go far toward subduing the lad, especially as he could continue to terrorize him with the thought of his mother's anguish at his disappearance.

Fortunately for his purpose he met no one in the house. He passed in through the kitchens and up the back stairs to the loft. Once, as he neared the ladder, the boy moaned again, and the Franklin shuddered with apprehension lest the sound might attract notice. The ladder was not easy for

him with his burden but he set his teeth and braced himself for the task. It was no easy one and he was nearly spent when he reached the upper floor and laid the boy down.

It was not very light but he managed to wash and bandage the cut on the back of the boy's head. It had bled considerably but he contrived to staunch the bleeding and to secure the dressing so that it would not easily come off. If the boy did not develop fever he would be all right, but his continued unconsciousness gave him considerable alarm. He was half inclined to fetch Dame Margaret, letting her suppose the whole affair to be the result of an accident, but he hardened his heart. If Walter chose not to submit to his commands he would be a menace, not to him only, but to the whole of the Ethendene household. By hook or by crook the boy had to be subdued or worse might come of it.

He lingered for a little while but the boy remained unconscious. He wanted to remove the traces of the afternoon's work from his own person, so, placing a pitcher of water where Walter could easily reach it, he secured the shutter that closed the loft with a padlock and stole away to his own chamber.

* * * * *

It was several hours before Walter came to his senses. For a long while he scarcely realized anything of what had happened. Then, as the dull ache became a sharp pain, he opened his

eyes wearily. The moon had stolen a peep into the loft through the clouds. For a moment he wondered where he was. Little by little memory returned to him and he recognized the loft. Then he tried to move. He was weak and stiff and the attempt to sit up made his head swim. Besides, his clothes were wet from lying on the damp moss so that he trembled with cold.

For a while longer he lay back quite still, then he shuffled over to where a heap of curtains lay, where the pursuivant had thrown them and managed to possess himself of some of them. He was warmer after a while and began to feel better and to wonder why he was there.

He remembered that his father had been very angry with him, then had come a blow that had somehow seemed to put an end to all things.

He could not remember coming to the loft—

that he was fain to lie down again. In a little while the moonlight faded and through the dark window a star looked in as if to comfort him. For a little time longer the pain of his head kept him from sleeping, then he lost consciousness once more.

CHAPTER X.

THE HAND OF HIS FATHER.

WHEN Walter woke it was late in the morning for the sun was already creeping round to the south windows of the loft. He was weak for he had lost a considerable quantity of blood from the wound in his head and had eaten nothing since noon of the previous day. Moreover his head ached almost unbearably and he was consumed with thirst. Fortunately his eyes fell upon the pitcher of water that his father had left beside him and he drank. The water refreshed him and he rose and walked, rather slowly and unsteadily, to the opening of the loft. It was still closed and locked, and no sound came up to him from the house through the heavy trap door.

The thought of his mother's uneasiness increased his anguish. He knew that, whatever the Franklin had told her, she would be heart-broken, and he wondered if she knew where he was. With the memory of yesterday upon him he felt afraid—fighting was so much harder than he thought it might be and with the thought, fear entered into his soul for the first time—fear lest he might give way and do the Franklin's bidding. That fear sent him to his prayers. For a little while he

knelt, fighting against the pain and weakness that beset him, but he was obliged to lie down again for the ache in his head made him dizzy.

The cut in his head was sore and hot but he could not reach it very well and was afraid to remove the bandage lest it should start bleeding afresh.

Noon passed and the shades of night were already creeping over the loft when Cedric came. Walter was in a fitful sleep but the opening of the shutter woke him with a start. The Franklin brought bread and meat with him and a pitcher of water which he set down by the boy bidding him eat and drink. He watched him the while and his heart smote him, yet he was determined that come what might, he would have his way. A few days of solitary confinement in the loft, he argued, would break the boy's spirit. Yet, in his soul, he was proud of his son and the unflinching courage with which he had met all his persuasions. He knew that threats would prove unavailing, therefore when Walter had finished eating he spoke to the lad gently—even tenderly. The boy slid his hand into his father's and leaned against him a little; it was an old posture that he had been wont to fall into when he was a tiny child and the Franklin was touched in spite of his grim determination.

"Well, Walter—how goes it?" he asked, "your mother has been begging for a sight of you all day, but I would not have her see you thus. Women be cowards, boy; a little hurt affrights them."

"Not mother, father! She be no coward and 'twould be worse to her to know me hurt and she not able to come to me than to see me like this. I have wearied for her to-day—and for you—for I feared that you were angered against me, father." There was a pleading in the boy's voice that the Franklin resented.

"Nay, Walter lad, 'tis your own fault if your mother comes not. You angered me yesterday; I would not have her see the sore blow you constrained me to give you."

"'Twas an accident, father!" cried the boy eagerly, "I stood not firm and so I fell and doubtless my head struck a stone—'twas not your doing." With an affectionate little gesture he carried the Franklin's hand to his lips.

Cedric bit his lips. Walter was making his task harder than he had anticipated; there was something in the boy's generosity that irritated him; it was so unlike what he might have done himself.

"Well, then—" he said, and paused. The boy looked at him expectantly but he remained silent.

"Then? father," he said.

"Then, Walter, you will do as I will? You will sacrifice yourself a little for the sake of others?"

"Ask me anything else, father—but not that—" replied the boy. His hand fell from the Franklin's—a sudden faintness came to him for a moment, but he put it energetically from him and struggled to his feet.

Cedric rose from his seat on the oak chest and

walked deliberately to the ladder. He closed the shutter which he had only half replaced on his entrance and returned.

Walter knew that another battle of wills was imminent and with a swift thought of prayer he armed himself for the fray. If only his head had not ached so much, he thought, yet he braced himself to battle for the right whatever the consequence to himself.

Cedric laid his hand not ungently on the boy's shoulder: "I would not urge you to do this, Walter," he said, "did not the safety of others demand a sacrifice. I know, my son, that it must cost you somewhat—a little—er—self-respect—it may be—but you will quickly forget that sting when you see danger warded off from this house and those who dwell here—or ought to dwell here," he added quickly.

Walter bit his lips to keep back the tears; he felt the uselessness of contending with his father. For a moment Cedric waited for his reply, then, as he saw that the boy would give him none, his face darkened. But he would give the boy one more chance, and then—

"I have commanded you, Walter, I have argued, sought to persuade you, now there will be an end of all this. You shall accompany me to Fordwich Church and take the sacrament as I order you. You are but a boy, not of age to judge for yourself and I require your obedience."

The boy looked up unflinchingly: "Then I be sorry, father. Methinks 'twould do more harm than good to your cause were I to refuse in public

—and that I'm bound to do, no matter what the outcome."

"I'll kill you first!" Walter's face grew white and he shuddered:

"Nay, father—let some other hand do that an it needs must be. You—"

The words were never finished for the Franklin's rage and fear had conquered him. Seizing a heavy hunting whip from a heap of lumber at his hand he struck the boy repeatedly and savagely.

Walter flung up his hands to protect his face but he made no resistance nor cried out. The silence was unbroken save by the heavy breathing of the angry man and the hissing of the whip as it descended time after time upon the boy, cutting his clothes in shreds and tearing the bandage from his wound. He fell at last and Cedric, beside himself with rage, kicked him savagely:

"Get up! get up, Walter, I say!" he shouted. They were the first words that he had spoken but there was no response.

Walter was insensible with blood flowing from the old as well as from the new wounds. For a moment Cedric stood over him as though he would force him to rise by sheer will power, then, as he saw the white face quiver and a sound that was half a sigh and half a moan escaped his victim, he waited. But the boy gave no further sign of life and Cedric turned and fled, staying only to lock the entrance to the loft and carry away the key.

Dame Margaret started up and sprang to meet

him as he passed through the Great Hall, but he shook her off roughly and went out, banging the heavy door behind him.

For a few moments she waited with her little hands clasped tightly before her. Then she heard the Franklin's horse brought round and peered from the window to see him ride forth alone.

With a sigh of relief she hastened to the loft, for she was sick with suspense. The shutter was closed tightly—and locked—she tapped lightly against it and received no reply.

"Walter!" she called, softly at first, then more loudly: "Walter! Walter!"

There was no response and she could not detect any sound within. For a little while fear held her powerless so that she could not think, then, as she still received no response to her continued knocking, she resolved to seek out Etheldreda and ask her advice. It was then only that she remembered that she had not seen the girl since noon.

She went to Michael.

"Mistress Etheldreda? Nay, Lady, I saw her leave the house by way of the shrubbery but a few minutes since, it may be half an hour."

"And she hath not returned?"

"I have not seen her."

"Thanks, Michael. Stay; best not to mention to any one that I asked you, it may hap that she hath—business."

"Your orders shall be observed, Dame," he said.

Margaret waited for a moment until the old

man had gone; she dared not seem too anxious, and the Franklin might return at any moment; her instinct bade her be wary.

The dark had fallen when she stole out into the shrubbery with one thought only in her mind—to seek out her son and discover what had befallen him. She walked slowly with her cloak folded closely about her. She felt the need of sympathy—of advice. The closed loft—the silence—her unanswered appeals—the memory of Cedric's face as he had passed her in the Great Hall—all inspired her with fear—she scarcely knew of what.

Evidently Etheldreda had already returned to the house for she was not in the shrubbery, then, a sudden flash of light startled her and she looked up. There were people in the old loft—and a moving light. Her heart stood still—then she nearly cried out—and held her peace for Walter's sake. She was not far from the kitchen and slipped into the house that way; there happened to be no one about at the moment so that she entered unobserved and went to her chamber where she left her cloak. In a few moments she was again at the loft door listening with strained attention to the sounds within. She heard a low moan and then the trickling of water in a bowl—and then a voice:

"Courage, Walter, drink this." It was Etheldreda's voice. She pushed against the shutter with all her strength but in vain for it would not yield. She beat upon it with her hands and cried aloud. There was silence, followed by the

sound of someone walking cautiously across the floor—the little swish of a woman's garments as she rustled to her knees—and Etheldreda's voice:

"I cannot let you in, Aunt Margaret, for the door is locked. I will come to you in an hour's time and tell you all. Be of good heart, I will explain it to you then. Don't stay here; Uncle Cedric may return at any moment and he must not find me here—nor you."

"But—Walter—I *must know*, Etheldreda."

"You shall, Aunt Margaret. For Walter's sake go now."

She trembled but obeyed and crept shuddering to her chamber to wait the miserable hour of suspense as best she might.

Visions of horrors passed in swift procession before her—she had heard a groan—and knew that something dreadful must have happened. She knew it by her husband's face, by the boy's moan, by Etheldreda's voice speaking to him. Oh! for the long dark hour to elapse. In her terror she knelt—her prayer was speechless—she was stricken dumb before this fear. In part she guessed the cause of the boy's trouble for Cedric had nearly betrayed himself in seeking to explain his absence, yet he had given her no clear account of what had occurred—only that the boy had been disobedient, obstinate and that he had locked him in to think over the matter of his offence. He had added that henceforth he would undertake the boy's training, for that he was growing too old for petticoat government. That was all that he had told her but she realized something more—

something that he was afraid to make known and it terrified her. All this passed through her mind as she knelt and made her wordless petition for strength to do right and to suffer wrong patiently.

The Franklin broke in on her as she knelt there. "Why, Margaret!" he cried, "weeping, woman! what's amiss?"

"I would know what hath chanced to Walter, Cedric. 'Tis overlong to keep the boy shut up. Bethink you of pity—or tell me what he hath done to anger you thus. Suffer me to go to him—I will advise him for his good—let me go, Cedric—let me go." She had not risen from her knees, she had but turned to him as she knelt beside the bed.

He saw the trouble in her eyes and the dark circles under them—the spectacle of her terror increased his.

"Nay, Margaret, you go not—not to-night!" he said.

"And wherefore? Nay, Cedric. In this you shall not compel me. I am your wife. Have I not ever been dutiful, observant of your commands, zealous for your interests? But I am also Walter's mother and as such I have the right, the Godgiven right to know what hath befallen my son. My right is as great as yours. If you are his father I am his mother too, and mother-love methinks be more tender than even father-love. Bethink you, ever since Walter was a little babe he hath obeyed my slightest wish—I cannot think him what you say—obstinate and disobedient—Husband! you have not understood him right."

She had risen and stood beside him, he turned his face from her and shook her hand from his arm.

"Go to, Margaret! you are like the rest of the women, an your boy be beaten you think him killed." His voice trembled in spite of himself as he uttered the last word.

"Beaten—you—you beat Walter, Cedric?"

"Ay. And why not? 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' remember. You have ever been soft with the boy—'tis time he was done with womanish ways; I'll make a man of him."

"But—but—Walter—" her voice faltered and she burst into tears. "Let me go to him, Cedric. I know that he be heart-broken. Let me but talk with him—show him—convince him."

"Impossible, Dame. I tell you that no one goes to him to-night. To-morrow I will go to him myself. I'll warrant you he'll be more submissive then." He turned his face to her as he spoke. It frightened her so that she shrank from him. She remembered the light in the loft and Etheldreda's voice. The boy's moan seemed to take shape and stand like a menace between her and her husband. She thrust away the thought and strove to devise some means for obtaining speech with her niece. Cedric had flung himself from the room and she followed him, fearing lest he might return to the loft and find Etheldreda there.

She guessed that the girl had entered it by the priest's passage and strove to be thankful that she had been able to get to Walter. The knowledge that he had been succored was some relief

to her, but the agony of suspense was getting greater than she could bear. From the head of the staircase she looked into the Great Hall and saw Cedric seated moodily by the hearth. There were fear and despair in his bearing so that she longed to go to him and comfort him. He was her husband and Walter's father and she could not forget those ties even when he was wringing her heart with anguish. For a few moments she watched him, then she gathered her skirts about her so that they made no betraying sound and fled to Dame Gertrude.

The Dame was seated in a deep arm chair, her hands, idle for once, lay passively in her lap. She raised her head as the Franklin's wife entered.

"Etheldreda!" she said, half doubtfully.

"Nay, Gertrude, 'tis I. Where be Etheldreda?"

"She be gone on some errand to her brother—or so I think. 'Twas Tirzah summoned her, she went an hour since, maybe more."

"She be in the loft now, or was there a little while since. Cedric hath locked Walter in there since yestereve and will not suffer me to go to him."

"And wherefore?"

"Nay, good sister, I know not surely. Only that Cedric saith that he be disobedient and obstinate. I fear me, mind I know not, I fear me that he hath striven to make the child conform."

"Not Walter! not the boy! Oh, Margaret!" She held out her arms to Dame Margaret who crept into them sobbing out all her dread and suspense like a child. Dame Gertrude suffered

her to weep, not speaking to her but smoothing her dark curls tenderly with a loving hand.

Etheldreda found them thus when she entered the room. They had not heard her soft footstep and started when she spoke.

"Walter be all right, Aunt Margaret. He bade me tell you not to fret on his account. We have gotten him safely away, Tirzah and I, yet we will not tell you where, lest Uncle Cedric inquire of you."

She knelt down beside Dame Margaret and passed her arm about her. "Nay, weep not, you should be proud this day for your son hath proved himself worthy. He would tell me naught save that Uncle Cedric struck him. In sooth, he was so sore hurt that I sent Tirzah to fetch Harold. He came and Walter told him what had passed. But we deemed it best not to leave him in the Franklin's power. He be gone away safely with Harold, and the secret to the passage hath been kept too."

Dame Margaret's tears fell afresh—tears in part of relief—yet of dread too. This was but the beginning and she foresaw the future dark and threatening before her.

"And Walter sent me no word?" she asked after a pause.

"Ay, Aunt Margaret, he did so. He bade me tell you that he had done only what his conscience, and Father Franklin approve. That it is chiefly for the Franklin's sake and to save him he be gone with Harold, and that he will visit you at the first opportunity."

She did not add that the message had been given

to her in broken sentences, between moans of pain, or that the Franklin must have been beside himself with rage when he had laid such blows on his young son. So she spared the mother heart that had suffered so much and still had so much to endure and did her best to soften the facts. Yet Margaret guessed somewhat of the true state of affairs with the intuition of mother-love; for Walter had been for her the one bright spot in life since Cedric Franklin had taken to evil ways.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

THAT night a storm arose. It was no slight wind with gentle rain, but a hurricane that shrieked and howled about the Hall, and sheets of water that the wind drove before it with the force of twenty storms.

Michael stayed up to watch. He had been all his life in the service of the Franklins as his fathers had been before him for several generations. He remembered the old prophecy,* that the house of Franklin that had arisen in a storm, should likewise perish in one, and he crossed himself devoutly praying that the forces of evil might be restrained from doing harm to the Hall or its inmates.

The trees in the park rocked and groaned before the fierceness of the angry blast; now and again a bough snapped with a report like musketry, and, to crown the destruction of that night, the great yew tree that had stood for upwards of a

* Ye Franklynne cometh in ye winde and storne,
In ye winde and storne he flyeth,
He flyeth hence in ye grey, grey dawne,
In ye grey, grey dawne he dyeth.

—*Old English Song.*

thousand years at the threshold of the Franklins was uprooted and fell with a heavy crash across the wide stone steps that led to the entrance. To Michael it seemed to portend the fall of the ancient house.

Dame Margaret lay still and strove to pray. Her mind was relieved to know that Walter was safely away, yet her heart was sore too, and she wondered if her boy were sheltered from the storm. The night lamp showed the heavy hangings fluttering when the fierce blasts of wind penetrated the crevices of the casement and she rose to watch the storm. She could see but little for the night was dark, but now and then she thought that she could distinguish moving lights at some distance from the house. She wondered a little who was abroad in that storm, and the thought of Walter came to her again. But when she remembered that the boy was in Father Franklin's care she put anxiety from her.

For a few moments there had been a lull in the tempest and the Dame began to hope that the worst of the storm had passed over. But it was not long before a new blast struck the house. She shuddered at the fierceness of it, and, for a few moments she could hear nothing save the confused roar of the elements, then the great yew crashed down and her heart stood still—it seemed to her as though the world were coming to its ending.

The night lamp was dying out—it flickered once and the flaring light showed her Cedric's face. The sight shocked her—it was so distorted with

fear. She began to realize his weakness and his temptations and put out her hand to him. He was standing where she had been but a few moments before, for the fall of the great tree had brought him to the window.

"The Franklins come and go in the storm," he said, clutching at her hand, as a drowning man holds on to another in the like plight.

"Nay, Cedric. That be an old superstition; the Franklins come and go as God ordereth."

"And in the storm, Margaret. Red Rollo came to Ethendene in just such a tempest as this, and—you have heard the old prophecy?"

"Ay, Cedric. But what need we reckon of heathen prophecies? 'Twas more like to be the rhyme that dictated the word than aught else."

"'In ye grey, grey dawn he dyeth,' it be dawn now, Margaret." He clung to her hand still and peered fearfully into the darkness. "I be not the Franklin, Margaret? There be another?"—

She did not catch his meaning for a moment, when she did she shivered. "Nay, Cedric, the priest be the true Franklin."

He tore his hand from her clasp and stumbled from the room. Michael was in the Hall below striving to kindle a fire, but the wind poured down the wide open chimney till the place was full of smoke and the logs would not catch. The Franklin threw himself upon the great oaken settle by the side of the hearth and waited, he did not speak. Michael stole furtive looks at him from time to time, the terror in Cedric's eyes increased the old man's misgivings and in spite

of himself his thoughts dwelt on the fallen yew outside.

The grey dawn crept up slowly for the sky was shrouded in heavy clouds that the wind drove before it in ever-increasing density. It was long before it was light and even then, the storm, so far from diminishing, appeared to be on the increase. It was as though the very demons were let loose and howled with rage. Cedric was in mortal terror—he had even forgotten about Walter, until a sudden blast that howled about the house blew into the unglazed casement of the loft and overturned some planks that had stood on end against the wall.

They fell with a clatter and the Franklin started to his feet. It might be that the boy was not dead after all. For the moment he was stunned, for he felt that he had to face another difficulty. Michael looked after him in amazement as he sprang up the stairs and passed down the stone corridor making straight for the loft.

The shutter was still fast and he unlocked it. For a moment he looked about expecting to find Walter, and, with a renewed sensation of fear he called his name, softly at first, then more loudly as he realized that the noise of the storm would drown his voice.

The boy was gone! He wondered if he were dreaming; there were traces of his having been there—a heap of curtains on which he had lain—the pitcher that he had brought to him with water—He turned the curtains over, they were still damp and the stains on his hands were red.

"Blood! more blood!" he cried in anguish as he continued his search. But there seemed to be no clue as to how the boy had gotten away. The loft had been locked and he had carried the key himself. He had become convinced that some person had aided his flight and then—he caught sight of the rope!

It was but a hastily made affair contrived by the knotting together of several curtains. They were secured to a hook in the wall, a little above the unglazed window and fell down outside it. He peered cautiously from the casement, the rope, which nearly reached the ground, was drenched with rain and swung dismally in the wind.

Cedric drew it up mechanically. It, too, was stained with crimson that came off on his hands and he shuddered at the sight. For a little while he sat down and tried to think. There was nothing but fear for him out of it all. Fear of the storm—fear for Red Rollo's prophecy—fear of Walter's escape. Without his son, to produce as an evidence of his loyalty to the Queen's religion, he felt that he would be undone—and despair seized upon him anew.

For the time he could see no loophole for his own escape. Even his former friend, Thomas Sherwood, had mocked him: "'Twas pity!" he had said—and: "The late Franklin was a worthy man who lived in peace with his neighbors and troubled no one. He might have weathered the storm and no harm done." It was all true! and the terror that had paralyzed his cowardly soul

crouched by him still like a tiger that waits to spring.

He rose at length. The storm was still increasing; his anger and terror rose to madness. Someone must have helped the boy to escape him. It was clearly impossible for him to have gone alone—and in that condition. Yet the rope seemed to bear evidence of the manner of his journey—doubtless the boy in his desperation had helped himself thus far—still it was almost unbelievable.

He passed over the members of the household in his mind. His wife had not been out of sight for long—she was out of the question. Etheldreda was but a girl—Dame Gertrude blind—impossible! The memory of the wild laugh that had so terrified him in the wood recurred to him—and the rustling of the undergrowth. The gypsy came to his mind—ay! doubtless 'twas she—but if so then she must have seen him strike the boy and might have followed him unobserved for he had been too much occupied in getting the boy into safe hiding to pay any heed to things that would scarcely have escaped him at another time.

For a little while longer he lingered in the empty loft while his brain was still busy with the problem that haunted him and he vowed to be revenged, no matter who had spirited the boy away, and to get him back too for he needed him. Perhaps after all his wife wasn't so innocent as she appeared to be. The thought sent him back to her.

He found her calmer, and his suspicions were aroused.

"They boy has run away," he said carelessly. She caught her breath—"When? Where?" she said.

"Nay, Margaret, I be inclined to think that you know somewhat more than would appear. Did you aid the boy's escape? Remember, I will have him back again."

She shook her head: "Nay, Cedric, I aided him not. How could I? for the loft was locked and I could not get in—I did try."

"Ah! you did try. Doubtless you spoke with him?"

"Nay, Cedric, I called his name but he answered me not."

"I bade you not go to him."

"And I told you that I would, for I had the right, yet when I did he spoke not."

"Belike he was already gone," he said. "An you had brought up your son better, Dame, you had not been troubled about him now."

"How?—better, Cedric?"

"Nay, must I tell you? Methinks you are strangely perverse, Margaret. The Queen's Grace must be obeyed—I will have it so—and I am master in this house."

"In what, husband?"

"I will have you all to conform with me. The times be evil and there be no safety for any man otherwise and I look for the well being of mine household."

"Got to, Cedric! If that be your sole cause of complaint against Walter, I be well content. The boy be what you were once—a good Catholic and

faithful son of Holy Church. I be glad—glad! that he stood firm; yet I be glad too, that he be beyond your power.”

“Beyond my power? Then you know more than I, Dame. I suspect you and yon gypsy woman of plotting this affair. I warn you, Margaret, I’ll not give in, an you vex me over much you shall conform yourself.”

“I?” her eyes flashed bravely—“Not *I*, Cedric; by the grace of God.”

“Tush, woman! others have said as much and conformed just the same when they found themselves in peril. I go now to find the gypsy—do you bide in the Hall.”

She caught his arm: “Go not now, Cedric. Listen to the storm; you’ll not find Tirzah abroad in this—and if you do find her, how will it avail you? She would not tell you aught, suppose even that she knew.”

The wind had increased again in violence; it shrieked and howled about the old house as though it sought to demolish it—yet it had withstood the storms of ten centuries. Margaret rose and paced the hall, she could not sit still at her embroidery that day. The trees in the park had already suffered severely and now the top of a giant elm snapped with a sharp report and fell amongst the bushes in the shrubbery. Dame Margaret put her hands to her ears: “I like not this storm, Cedric,” she said. “There be something more than ordinary in its violence. ’Tis as though the demons were let loose upon us.” She crossed herself as she spoke.

"Nay, but I like not the prophecy," he said again.

She smiled at him: "'Tis but the idle song of a heathen bard," she said. "I place not faith in such."

"Nevertheless, 'twill come true."

"An it come to pass I think not otherwise; 'twill not be for the prophecy, but for the ordering of God."

"A truce to your contendings! An the prophecy be true 'twill come to pass."

"Granted, Cedric. But it be not come to pass yet."

She seated herself once more and her hands busied themselves with her embroidery, but her thoughts were with Walter and the perplexities of the moment.

She decided at last to make one more appeal to the Franklin. He was sitting huddled together on the settle by the hearth. For a little while the wind had seemed to be abating. She crossed the hearth and sat on a low stool by his side:

"Cedric," she said, and there was a tender intonation in her voice that made him wince. He was proud of his wife and as fond of her as so selfish a man could be. He hated to see her vexed, yet if she chose to set herself up against him he told himself he couldn't help it. He reached out his hand to her now and she took it in both of hers: "Cedric, why can't we be as we were before? When we lived in the little house at Fordwich we were happy. We prayed as we listed and slept in peace. Now there be talk of 'conforming'

and we sleep not for fear of that which may chance. Let us away from this house—we could go back to Fordwich—or—better still—to France, and Gertrude would have this house which really should be hers—or Etheldreda's."

He drew back his hand suddenly: "Ay! that's it. As long as Gertrude remains here 'tis not like our own home, and as for Etheldreda, she be over pert. I have a mind to send them forth."

"Send them forth, Cedric? Whither?—and wherefore?"

"There be no living with them in the house, when even you complain."

"Cedric! Complain! I?—nay, you do me more than injustice. Dame Gertrude should be mistress here—not I. 'Tis a foul wrong we do them, an we remain."

"I'll send them forth!" he cried and rose tossing her hand carelessly from him.

She threw herself on her knees before him.

"What have I said, Cedric, that you should take it so? I but begged you to restore this property, which in very truth be not ours, to its lawful owners."

"And go, a beggar to France?—a likely story! Dame, you are more foolish than I thought. Nay, I go not from Etheldene until I be forced. I have given my soul for it—even Satan keeps his bargains."

"'Tis true! 'tis your soul for a house and lands! Cedric, husband, forbear! before the judgment of God overtakes us."

He started from her pushing her hands roughly

from his arm where she had laid them in the earnestness of her appeal.

"A truce to this folly, Dame!" he cried as he sprang rather than walked to the staircase.

She stood trembling, clutching at her gown, her breath came and went hurriedly, her eyes were full of anguish.

The Franklin had disappeared in the gloom of the stone corridor. She could hear his hurried footfalls, the opening and banging of a door—voices—Etheldreda's in earnest expostulations—his in rapid uncouth reply. She lived a lifetime in the space of five minutes.

Then slowly—slowly—down the great staircase came Dame Gertrude leaning on Etheldreda's arm. The two women were cloaked and the girl was weeping furtively. Margaret shrieked and fell back on to the settle.

"Gertrude!" she cried. "Oh! Gertrude, forgive us! Cedric be beside himself—he means not this outrage."

"Peace, Margaret! this be not your affair. I be master here and will to be obeyed."

Dame Gertrude was long in descending the stairs. The Franklin came behind them as though he would drive them forth before him. Etheldreda waited until her mother had reached the ground in safety, then she turned:

"You lie, Franklin!" she said tensely, "you be *not* master here. Satan be master of Etheldene—and your master too, I verily believe."

"Forbear, Etheldreda!" broke in Dame Franklin hastily, "would you meet injustice with revil-

ing? Alas! that I should have to make a protest against mine own sainted husband's brother, yet, verily you be unjust, Cedric Franklin. Before God, you be not the master of Ethendene. For months past I have borne with you and your pretensions. I would have borne with them still had you but suffered me to live in my home in peace. Now I protest that this house be not yours; that it belongs to Etheldreda, seeing that my son hath, of his own will, passed it by. In the name of Justice—and in the sight of God, I lay claim to Ethendene on behalf of my daughter."

Cedric laughed coarsely: "Claim! Ay, claim it, Dame Gertrude. Claiming hurts me not for I have the Queen's Grace on my side—'twas she who granted me the estates."

"Which are not hers to grant, Cedric."

"I would not that she should hear you say as much."

"Nay, as for that I care not neither. Moreover, I believe in my heart that Her Grace would not hold you guiltless did she know all, and—mark me, Cedric Franklin! and you indeed persist in this injustice, the vengeance of God must follow you. Think not that your son shall be Franklin—or that you will die within the walls of this house."

"You threaten me?" he said, and his voice quivered with passion.

"Nay, I threaten not. I but say what I believe will come to pass, an you mend not your manners. Bethink you, Cedric of the cruelty of the injustice you do this day. Be warned, brother, and drive

not the widow and the orphan from their home in the very teeth of the storm. Your wife and son would cry shame; they could not be what they are and do otherwise. Come, Margaret!" she continued holding out her hand, "I would fain give you farewell, an we *must* go."

"Ay! you must go," broke in the Franklin, frowning at his wife.

She had already gone forward and now she folded Dame Gertrude in her arms: "Forgive us—" she whispered as she clung to the widow, "I verily believe that Cedric be beside himself with fear—and pray for us," she added softly.

"Ay, poor Margaret! Farewell—an it must needs be so. Come, Etheldreda child, we be cast forth from our home, but God will provide us with another. Fear not, the blessing of Heaven be more worth than any earthly thing. Cedric! forget not the claim I have made. God do to you as you respect it—and yet—not so—God send you repentance and a just mind. Farewell!"

She went forward slowly leaning on Etheldreda's arm. The girl was weeping, she did not even see her uncle as he stood beside the open door. As she passed her Dame Margaret caught her hand and carried it to her lips:

"Forgive us, Etheldreda," she whispered. The girl stopped for an instant:

"Farewell, Aunt Margaret!" she said and slipped her disengaged hand about the weeping woman's neck. "Courage—'twill not be long," she whispered, but Cedric would not brook delay.

"Come, come, Gertrude!" he said roughly, "enough of this; tarry no longer."

Michael had been hovering about since morning; he came forward now and offered his arm to Dame Gertrude:

"I be an old man, Dame," he said, "nigh upon four score, I be loth to die in Ethendene an you be driven forth. I go with you."

The Dame stood for an instant: "Old friend! I have not anything to requite you," she said unsteadily. "I may not drag you hence with me—yet I thank you for your charity."

"Nevertheless I go, Dame. My master, the late Franklin would have bidden me stand by you—and this man hath neither my heart nor my service. Come, dear Mistress, the way be rough and the storm be fierce, but 'twill pass; 'tis but a shadowed place on the road to Heaven and I would tread it with you, an you will suffer me."

She was too moved to reply, but she placed her hand on his offered arm and passed through the open door of Ethendene into the teeth of the storm.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUT BY THE SEA.

It had been a mild day in late November; a delicate mist was spread over the sea through which the sunbeams passed like rays of glory pouring through a silver veil. The tall white, green-capped cliffs that stood in an unbroken line for a considerable distance formed a home for many sea-gulls and wild fowl which flew easily and slowly about their summits or swooped down to the grey waters below in search of their evening meal. Half way down the cliff, upon a grassy ledge that was screened from observation by the over-hanging wall of chalk above it, stood a little white cottage, or rather a hut, which was the refuge of Dame Gertrude and Etheldreda—and of Michael also who was at once their servitor, messenger and guardian.

Tirzah had discovered the place which had formerly belonged to a fisherman. It had been abandoned ever since the fall of the cliff that had destroyed the Church of St. Nicholas and wrecked the old graveyard. It had suited her to promote the stories that centered around the ruins of the old church and the neighboring cliffs, and caused

them to be shunned by the peasants, for many of the gypsies made their winter homes in deserted huts and the better sort of caves that abounded in the district, and afforded them better shelter than their own tents when the storms of winter were upon them.

Father Franklin had gone away. His district was a large one, extending for several miles inland and across the peninsula to the Straits of Dover beyond. He had taken Walter with him, for he was anxious to keep the boy away from Ethendene, though his father, and indeed nearly everyone believed him to have perished in the storm. Tirzah had however contrived to convey the news of his wellbeing to Dame Margaret and she was easier for his absence though she wearied for the presence of her son. It was now nearly time for the priest's return and Dame Gertrude looked forward to the meeting eagerly. She felt that her days were drawing to a close and she hungered for the consolations of religion.

She had heard no news from Ethendene for a long while, for Tirzah had not ventured near the Hall for fear of being tracked to the Dame's retreat. Once only she had stolen into the loft through the priest's passage and brought away such of the hangings and clothes as she could find and deemed useful for the comfort of Dame Gertrude and her daughter. After that visit she had reclosed the passage so as to guard against surprise from that quarter.

Dame Gertrude and Etheldreda sat busily at their wheels in that fair afternoon in November,

for they had to depend upon the work of their hands for a livelihood. It was Michael who served as their messenger in conveying the flax to Tirzah who disposed of it for them, receiving in exchange such necessities as the two ladies required.

It might have been a peaceful existence had it not been for the sense of being hunted that spoiled it all. The Dame was calm, outwardly at least, but Etheldreda could not restrain her impatience at times, but on this calm day the peace of the evening seemed to have sunk into her soul. She looked through the open door upon the tranquil grey sea with the subdued sunlight resting upon it and rose hastily:

"Mother!" she cried, "it be so fair without! leave your wheel and come here with me for a little space. I will tell you what like be the sea and the sky—all that you most love to hear of." She went to her mother as she ceased speaking and kissed her tenderly on the brow.

The Dame smiled: "Nay then, child, an it please you I will come out for a while and stand in the sunlight while you tell me all the news."

"Nay. There be no news, mother—or Tirzah told me none. Harold be not yet come—yet he may arrive any day—I long to see him, mother—and Walter, too. Tirzah said not that he had taken Walter with him—yet I trow he hath, else he had been here by now. Poor lad! he was very thin and pale when last I saw him, and he had great red scars that covered his poor hands."

"Honorable wounds, gotten in an honorable

fight, Etheldreda. Dear lad!" she said, and smiled so that the girl knew her thoughts were far away. "Poor Margaret!" she sighed after a pause, "her load be so much heavier than ours—and her life sorrier—at least we be as one—and free to speak as we will and pray as we will, with no dread of spies to torture us or pursuivants to disturb us at unseemly hours."

"And yet—this life be a hard one for you, mother."

"Why hard, child? Nay, this be a very haven of peace and we be safe under the shadow of the cliffs, which speaks to me of the overshadowing of Providence. Yet, mistake me not, Etheldreda, 'tis but a respite—a breathing time before other conflicts yet to come."

The girl trembled—"you—you will not leave me, mother?" she murmured fearfully, as she looked upon the ravages which suffering rather than time had made in the once stately figure. 'Twas not so long since that slender form had been erect as a poplar tree; that white hair as bright as her own; those sightless eyes full of fire and intensity.

Dame Gertrude lightly touched the girl's hand: "Nay, we know not the day nor the hour, child. I spoke not of that—and yet I feel that it must come soon. I thought of other sorrows that might come to you and me."

Etheldreda started—"To you and me, mother?—and Harold?"

"Nay, child, Harold be a man—to him not sorrow but conflict."

"Conflict? Harold! Ah!—an it be so then may God have mercy on us! yet I would not have him be less than others who have died. When my—my—father—died I thought to have tasted the deepest depths of sorrow—it seemed to me that there could be no pain like that—mother—you have shown me worse, for, an Harold be called to the conflict, you could not survive the anguish." She broke down at the last and threw her arms about the Dame. For some moments she could not control her emotion—then, with a swift sudden effort she raised her head and signed herself with the cross. Dame Gertrude did not speak, only the hand that still clasped Etheldreda's held it closely as though her sightless eyes had witnessed the girl's surrender.

For a little while they stood in silence; then:

"The prize is Heaven," said the Dame softly, and Etheldreda pressed her hand in token that she understood as she led her into the hut.

It was nearly dark within as she busied herself about the hearth raking together the embers and coaxing them into a blaze with dry twigs that she took from a little hollow in the cliff behind the house.

The mist was thickening and they would be able to have a good fire without danger of the smoke betraying them. The sun went down in a glory of pale gold that turned to purple and faded to grey, then the fog crept up and up until it enveloped the whole of the seashore and Etheldreda piled on the logs with a cheerful laugh.

"To-night we can have a fire, mother, for the

fog will hide our smoke. Shall I give you a hot supper and a dish of soup?"

"Be wary, my child, the light might betray us."

"That cannot be; the cliff hangs over too far for the light to be seen from the land and the door is easily screened from the outside. 'Twas Tirzah's thought to have it set so that it might keep the light from the sight of passing ships. It may be that she will come to-night, she half promised me that she would. I'll make cakes and we'll have a feast."

The widow smiled, she found the warmth pleasant for the fog had dampened everything.

"Nay, do as you list, child, only be wary. Danger ever comes when least expected. So Tirzah be like to come to us to-night? 'Tis nearly a week since she came. Where be Michael?"

"Here he be, Dame!" cried the old man in a cheery voice as he stepped into the firelight. "Nay, Mistress Etheldreda, you are beforehand with me, see what I bring you!" He held up a string of fish as he spoke for her to see.

"Fish, Michael! now we be well provided in truth! Here, take a seat and rest you; when you be comforted you can help me an you list."

"Nay, the sight of my dear Mistress be comfort enough for an old man like me." He threw off his heavy coat and laid it in a distant corner, then he busied himself about the hut setting things in order, though truly the place contained so little that it was quickly done. Then he drew some planks from a rack beside the door and

set them across two rests made by sawing a barrel in halves.

A piece of tapestry from the store that Tirzah had brought from the loft served for a tablecloth. Two trenchers, a porcelain dish for Dame Gertrude, and a drinking horn with a couple of hunting knives completed the arrangements. Michael surveyed the board with a comical look of dismay:

"Alack a day! we be undone!" he cried. "The tapestry curtains from the chapel for a tablecloth, and silver mounted horns forsooth! Methinks, and the Queen's Grace could see us, she might impose a fine to humble us somewhat."

Etheldreda laughed: "And to pay the fine we'd need to sell the goods! Go to, Michael! I like not this jest; think on some other."

The old man joined in her merriment: "'Tis for you to do that, Mistress; Michael be too old, his memory hath cracked and suffered the jests to runaway. You be ready?"

"Ay, Michael. The fish be broiled to a turn, set them on the board. The cakes be light and crisp."

"And smell good!" added the voice of a newcomer. "Nay, Aunt Gertrude, I will come to you," for the old lady had risen and was holding out her hands to welcome him.

"Walter, dear lad!" she faltered as he came to her and knelt, carrying her hand to his lips. Then grasping both of his hands in hers she "looked" at them with her light finger touch and bending kissed them: "Honorable scars, dear

boy," she whispered, "let nothing turn you from *that* stand—you did well; 'twas a brave beginning, 'be not weary in well doing.'"

"'Twas the only thing I could do, Aunt Gertrude. I had no choice for the conflict was forced upon me."

Etheldreda had waited for a moment while the boy was paying his respects to her mother, now she came forward flushed and heated from her exertions about the fire.

"God save you, Walter," she said, and there was a touch of reverence in her greeting.

"God save you, cousin," he responded brightly, "and you too, Michael. Ah! 'Tis good to be amongst you once more."

"Come, come!" called Etheldreda, "a truce to these greetings! the supper grows cold and my cakes spoil. Hand mother to her place, cousin, and fall to. Where's Tirzah?"

"She be coming after me—she be gone back to fetch somewhat that she hath forgot, she said. She'll not be long. 'Twas such a likely night that Father Franklin suffered me to come on alone."

"Is Harold come back?"

"Ay, Aunt Margaret. We got back to our 'hole in the rocks,' as I call it, this morning. We were sore weary for we had walked from Eastry and the road across the marshes was bad, and the streams not easy to ford. We dared not travel by daylight, and lay in a bog behind the ferry house at Sarre where we got somewhat wet. Then when night came we crept forth from our hiding place and so to a house ('twere

best not to name it for all our sakes) where we stayed a few hours and Father Franklin said Mass. After that we set forth again with all speed and reached the shore at dawn. A few hours sleep came not amiss and when we woke Tirzah was at our door."

"'Tis wonderful how she doth contrive to know things," broke in Etheldreda.

"Not so wonderful this time, cousin, for we have devised a means of signalling to her, and the lights of St. Nicholas be not all as ghostly as some believe. To make a short story of a long matter, she brought us comforts and 'twas then we heard how you had been put forth from Etheldene. We be all soldiers in the same cause it seems."

"And the combat be but beginning," said Dame Gertrude softly.

A little silence fell upon them, the silence that is more eloquent than speech. Etheldreda felt that her cousin's eyes were upon her and to hide her emotion she rose and went to the fire.

"I would that Tirzah would come, my cakes spoil," she said.

Walter laughed lightly: "Nay then, cousin, perchance she hath supped already," he suggested, "but indeed I believe she will be here anon. See! I'll come to aid you. Nay, sit down, Michael, you have done your share. 'Twas as good fish as I ever tasted—and fresh. That be one thing to the credit of your new home, at least you will scarcely starve."

For a few moments he lingered by the old

man, speaking to him in undertones. He turned to the Dame after a while:

"Come, Aunt Gertrude, an you have supped, suffer me to lead you to the fire."

She smiled at him as she rose and laid her hand confidently on his arm. He led her carefully to the one chair that the hut boasted. Etheldreda had covered it with an embroidered cloth and it looked not unlike the deep-seated arm-chair in the Great Hall at Ethendene, and the Dame was quite unaware of the fact that it was the only seat in the hut, if we except the barrels that Michael had sawn in halves and which made tolerable substitutes for chairs for outlawed people. For such they were practically, since both Dame Gertrude and Etheldreda were placed beyond the protection of the law by the attainder of the late Franklin, and Walter himself was not in a much better position seeing that his father might claim the authority of the same law for his persecution of the boy.

The Dame was scarcely seated when Tirzah came. She was laden with many small bundles which she deposited in a recess beside the hearth. After the first greetings Dame Franklin called her aside:

"Come and sit beside me, Tirzah," she said, "and tell me all that hath chanced. The flax!—you have brought it?—and you sold the yarn?"

"Ay, I have brought the flax, Dame—and for the yarn I have brought you, flour and meat, with some cheese and eggs, so that you will not want for a while."

"And Harold?"

"The Franklin? He be well, though he be thinner than when I saw him last—but he be right well, he saith, and bids you be of good cheer."

"And he will come to us soon?"

"Nay, that I know not, Dame. Last week I had no fear, now—I know not wherefore—I be more guarded. There be a spy at work I verily believe, but who it be, I know not, nor can discover."

"Our retreat has not been discovered?"

"Nay. But there be talk of visiting the Towers of St. Nicholas, for strange sounds have been heard there, and lights that flit from window to window have been seen. Yet there be few who would dare to go there after nightfall for the story goes that the old church be haunted."

"Ay, so I heard. Pray God the people continue so to believe for it be the best protection for those who bide there."

"Ay, lady, and there be not a traitor hidden amongst them."

"Must we always have traitors, Tirzah? Nay, I think not so for in this case the quarry be too humble to tempt the hunter. Those who bide in St. Nicholas have naught to lose to their captors."

"Yet the hunters be on the scent, lady; nothing be more sure. And we contrive not to baffle them, St. Nicholas be no longer a safe hiding place for the priest."

"Then he be at St. Nicholas?" whispered the Dame, bending toward Tirzah so that her lips came near her ear.

The gypsy bit her lip—she had not meant to betray so much, even to Dame Franklin—for the Dame's own sake.

"Ay, lady," she replied softly, "but ask me no more. Believe me 'tis far better so."

Dame Gertrude sighed and her lips twitched: "Very well, Tirzah," she said in the same tone and turned to Walter.

He had seated himself on the earthen floor of the hut at his aunt's feet. While she had been speaking with the gypsy he had been keeping up a bantering conversation with Etheldreda. Sometimes the two had appealed to Michael, but the old man was weary and it was evident that he was striving hard to keep awake. Walter saw it after a time.

"Go, lie down, Michael," he said, rising and going to the old man's side, "you be in need of rest. The day be done now and we be going soon. Tirzah, 'tis time we left these good people to repose. See! Michael be hard put to it to keep awake, and belike the Dame and my cousin would fain sleep too. Is it not so, Aunt Gertrude?"

"Perchance, yet I know not. Etheldreda! have you made all safe for the night?"

"Ay, mother, and put more logs on the fire for the night grows chill; the fog be thick o'er the sea and I cannot see the light at St. Nicholas."

"Then I will give you good-night, friends. Come hither, Walter, for I have to send greetings to Harold and I would fain have you the bearer of them."

He knelt at her knee and took both of her

hands in his: "I will be your liege-man, lady," he said lightly, "tell me but the greetings and I will engage to deliver them."

"Then, bid Harold welcome home," she said smiling at him, "and tell him too that his mother wearies for him. That, an he can safely come, I greatly desire the comforts of religion, for my days are numbered now. I feel that the end can not be long in coming and I fain would take counsel with him for his sister's welfare and mine own speeding on that last journey."

The boy looked keenly at her; he saw the deep lines of grief more deeply carven than of old, the hair was no whiter, the form was, mayhap, a little more bowed, but the peaceful expression of the face more profound; she found no terror in the advent of approaching dissolution. She looked as though nothing earthly could have power to move her more. When her voice died away a sob came into his throat:

"I—I'll carry your greetings to Father Franklin, Aunt Gertrude," he said. "Belike he'll come very soon, and when he comes I'll be with him, never doubt it. I go everywhere with him. And now good-night! I crave your blessing and your prayers. I'd like to live to be a man—and a priest, but God knows best and if they get me before then, I would fain play the man."

"With God's grace, dear lad," she cried and stooped to kiss him on the brow. "You be like your mother, Walter, both in stature and in strength."

"Nay, mother be not strong, Aunt Gertrude, she be frail."

"Ay, I know. But she be staunch of heart, and that be better than strong of limb. The Franklins be big folk, Etheldreda be such. I would she were safely in France 'twould ease me greatly did I know her beyond your father's power. Yet God knoweth best. I need her for a little while longer, an she doeth her duty to me 'twill bring her the blessing of Heaven."

She laid her hand gently on the boy's head: "God bless and keep you, Walter," she said, "and bring us all safely to His rest at the last."

"Amen, dear aunt. I will carry your message and your greeting to Father Franklin, farewell!"

He bent over her hand once more, she held his in her firm grasp a moment longer as though she feared the parting, then with a smile she released them: "Farewell, little soldier," she said and her words went with him as he stepped out into the damp chill of the foggy night like a distant call to the fray.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TOWERS OF ST. NICHOLAS.

HILDA stopped to listen for she had heard the murmur of voices in the shrubbery. Her first care was to close the door of the dairy carefully and draw the bar across it. Then she crept to the little window that was on a level with her eyes and peered forth. It was drawing towards evening and the Franklin was still abroad.

The voices appeared to belong to two persons—men—so far as she could judge by the depth of their tones. She stood at her window for a long while, her heart beating with excitement; but she could distinguish only a few words—Ethendene—and priest—and Sherwood, but those were sufficient to tell her that there was danger about. She waited patiently but heard no more, but in a little while the Franklin emerged from the path that lay a little way beyond the dairy window, and passed onward to the house.

He went slowly plucking absently at his ruff as he walked.

Hilda drew back into the shadow and waited—
“I would have staked my life on Andrew’s honesty,” she heard him mutter as he passed.

“Andrew!” said Hilda to herself, “nay, here be

a mystery, and of another color. I would that I might see the gypsy if it were but for a moment. I might put her on her guard. If Andrew be about there be something adoing."

She unbarred the door of the dairy and slipped quietly into the house. Dame Margaret met her in the stone corridor:

"Hilda!" she exclaimed, for the old woman wore a long dark cloak and carried a basket on her arm.

Hilda dropped a courtesy: "I pray your leave, Dame, to take some soup to the old body who lies sick over against St. Nicholas Church," she said.

"Ay, surely, Hilda, an you need aught else for her I pray you let me know it. See to it that she has what she needs whether it be food or clothes or medicine. Of late the Franklin cares not for me to go abroad. There be too many enemies about, he saith."

"Not enemies to you, lady," said Hilda quickly, "the poor folk love you too well to wish you aught but good."

Margaret smiled gently. "I fear them not, Hilda, yet, and the Franklin forbid me to go forth I must obey." She passed onward with a gracious inclination of her head and entered her chamber.

Hilda stood until she had disappeared: "Poor lady!" she murmured as she turned to depart on her errand of mercy.

The sun was just setting when she crossed the park and took to the marsh road. She walked swiftly for she was anxious to return as soon

as might be. Although she affected to despise the fears of peasantry she was not willing to linger after dusk in the neighborhood of the old graveyard, and in the meanwhile, to guard against ghostly visitants she prayed as she walked. Her fingers missed the pressure of the beads. Alas! they were forbidden luxuries and Catholics who were fortunate enough to possess a rosary dared not to carry it about with them. They were hidden in strange places, underneath floors, behind wainscoting, in crannies of old walls, even wrapped in linen and laid under large stones by the edge of some stream. Hilda had lost hers months ago from such a hiding place and she counted the 'Hail Marys' on her fingers now; but in spite of all difficulties she recited the whole of the rosary every day, for in times of 'Good Queen Bess,' Catholics had not forgotten how to pray. Rather they felt the need of constant prayer if they were to remain firm in their persecuted Faith.

Hilda came to the end of her rosary and of the marsh road at the same moment. She had reached the edge of the cliffs. Before her stood the gaunt grey towers of St. Nicholas' Church, showing blackly against the amber sky. There was a little murmur as of coming wind in the air and a white-sailed schooner rose and fell regularly on the tide as she passed on her way seaward. A few gulls circled about in her wake and their hoarse cries, mingled with the distant roar of the surf far down below her, were the only sounds that broke the stillness.

The scene invited to meditation and Hilda paused for a few moments. A figure came slowly into sight from the further side of the towers. For a moment he looked furtively about him, for the cloaked figure that had caught his eye was still standing in the light of the sunset. He crept forward approaching her from behind:

"Hilda! you here?"

She turned quickly at the familiar voice. "Michael!" she cried softly, "I would see Tirzah."

He laughed softly. "Nay, then, an you would so, follow me—but speak not." He walked quietly along at some little distance from the edge of the cliffs to avoid being seen too clearly against the sky-line. Hilda followed him closely until he came to a clump of bushes. Pushing these aside, he led the way to a small tent-like hut so ingeniously covered with dry branches and trailing brambles that it would have been difficult for one not in the secret to discover it. The old man put two fingers to his lips and whistled softly. They waited a moment and there was a rustling of the leaves and then the gypsy came from her concealment.

"Who called?" she asked softly, drawing back a little as she noticed that Michael had a companion.

"Nay, good Tirzah, 'tis but I. You should know Hilda."

"Ay, I know Hilda. But wherefore are you come to me? There be spies all about us and it behooves us to be wary."

"'Tis for that I come. This afternoon I over-

heard the Franklin speak with one in the shrubbery. I was in the dairy. I heard but a stray word or two, just—Ethendene—and priest—and Sherwood. Yet, as the Franklin passed moodily by the dairy I heard him mutter: 'I could have staked my life on Andrew's honesty,' and so I deemed it best to come to you and warn you. Methinks there be someone who carries reports to the Franklin, and Andrew be suspected.

"Andrew hath returned?"

"Not to the Hall. And yet the voice that I heard arguing with the Franklin might have been his. 'Tis all a puzzle."

"Said you aught to Dame Margaret?"

"Nay, I but ask leave to carry help to a sick body who dwells on the edge of the cliff, but indeed had I not feared to let the night pass without warning you I had not ventured so near the Towers and the light failing."

Tirzah laughed softly. She had a silvery laugh very pleasing at times although it adapted itself to her moods and expressed as many different emotions as speech in other people. "Nay, the ghosts of St. Nicholas be of the old Faith," she said, "and not like to hurt you, Hilda, an you pray earnestly for their eternal peace."

"Yet the way be long, not to say lonesome in these wild days," protested Hilda.

"I'll set you on the way," replied the gypsy gently, "and thank you for your warning. Michael, an you have no message for me there be no need for you to stay, the twilight be gathered already."

"Nay—I would hear, that I may tell—" Tirzah laid her hand swiftly on his lips.

"Silence," she said sternly, "tell no names and solve no riddles—an you would ask—ask. But for your own informing." She took her hand from his lips and her eyes smiled at him.

Michael laughed awkwardly: "You be swift, Tirzah, yet maybe you be right too. Hilda needeth not to know secrets. But I would know how it fares with the Lady Margaret? And the Franklin, be he gloomy or merry. Hath he no word for Master Walter? Tell me all, the time has passed but slowly with me since I went forth from Ethen-dene."

"Nay then, Michael, the Franklin be gloomy and morose. Since the day of the storm he appeareth to be in a continual dread, so that he starts if one but closes a door sharply or treads heavily on the staircase."

"And did he search for the Lady Gertrude and Mistress Etheldreda?"

"Nay, not for them. He desired Dame Margaret, and through her all the rest of the household, not to so much as speak their names."

"Ah! so he seeks forgetfulness! And Master Walter, said he aught anent him?"

"He deems that he perished in the storm. There be somewhat of a mystery in it that I understand not, yet Dame Margaret weeps not for him. She be failing too—looks thin and pale—not as she used to do. The Franklin hath likewise forbidden her the park, so she be like to look pale and weak,"

"Poor lad! But, tell me, Hilda, did he not search for the boy?"

"Ay. It seems that Master Walter angered him somewhat, and so he locked him in the loft. On the night of the storm he escaped from a window. The Franklin was wroth when he searched the loft and found only a string of curtains knotted together by which the lad had slipped to the ground and made his escape. 'Twas still hanging from the casement and the ground beneath was trampled this way and that. But he found nothing and he be gloomy and morose ever since. He sits by the hour gnawing at his fingers and playing with the hilt of his sword as though he willed somewhat that he dared not."

"And the loft—he searched the loft—be sure?"

"Ay, he searched it for I heard him tramping back and forth swearing roundly to himself the while, and then, when he found nothing, he locked it and flung the key into the spring that runs through the dairy. See! here it be. I saw him throw it in. I left it there for a few days until it seemed safe to remove it, then I fished it out, for I knew, an he had a mind to hide it, it might be useful some day."

"You did well," broke in Tirzah, "keep it carefully, Hilda, until I ask you for the use of it. With this—and the other secret that we know—we should be able to do somewhat in case of need."

Hilda peered at her suspiciously, the light had nearly faded. "Do what?" she said sharply as she dropped the key into her basket.

"Nay, Hilda, leave that to me. Stay! give me

the pitcher that you carry. I'll send the soup to your pensioner faithfully, and get you gone with all speed. On second thoughts, I'll not come with you. 'Twere best maybe for you to go alone, but Michael shall follow you at a little distance until you be safely through the wood."

The gypsy stood looking after her until she entered upon the marsh road, then she turned back into her hut.

Hilda was disturbed and a little distrustful. She scarcely understood why Tirzah should be so secret with her, and she had learned nothing although, when she came to recall the conversation she discovered that she had told a good deal. It was disappointing, still she had given the warning that appeared to be needed.

She could not help wondering who it was whom Cedric had met in the shrubbery. Then as she entered the darkness of the wood she grew anxious to be safely home. She thought that she could hear footsteps following her and stopped to listen. The footsteps stopped too and she nearly cried out until she remembered Michael and went on again. It was so dark that she stumbled from time to time but she hastened onward and soon emerged from the wood. As she did so she looked seaward and cried out in terror for there were lights in the two dark towers that stood black against the dark of the sky and white figures flitted here and there amongst the graves. For a moment her knees trembled under her then she drew her cloak more closely about her and ran until she reached the borders of the shrubbery.

From thence she made her way into the house easily. The household was at supper in the Great Hall and she slipped in and took her place next to Dame Margaret's tirewoman who greeted her with a whispered inquiry as to where she had been.

"To carry comforts to a pensioner of Dame Gertrude," she whispered in reply and caught Dame Margaret's look of relief at seeing her back again.

The meal was a silent one for the Franklin sat scowling at the head of the board and the Dame was evidently ill at ease and afraid to speak to him, so that it was a relief to everyone when he pushed his chair away and went to his accustomed seat beside the hearth. Dame Margaret followed him slowly and drew out her embroidery frame. He watched her intently for some time.

"Toys! toys!" he said, "women be ever busied with such trash. Yet you be skilful, Margaret; 'tis a fair design and cunningly executed."

She smiled at him: "Nay, were it not for our 'toys' we'd find the days over long. As it is there's no time to brood, for occupation makes the hours fly."

"Yet there be wounds no surgeon may heal, and hours too heavy for aught to enlighten. Dame, I would that I knew what of Walter. At times it seems to me that he must be dead, and then I hope against hope that some day he will return. See!" he continued, holding out his right hand before him, "see my hand, there's blood upon it, Margaret! Nay, be not afraid, I meant not that I see it there, but in the dead of night, when you

and all the world sleep, I wake from fearful dreams and long to cry out as a woman might and I dare not—for shame to be thought a coward.” He had risen and stood in front of the hearth. She looked at him and caught her breath; never had she been so tempted to tell him that his son lived. From the depths of her soul she pitied him with that pity which is not merely akin to love but even its own child, for her pity was born of charity. It was for the boy’s sake alone that she forbore, fearing lest the revelation might come too soon. And so she held her peace.

In after years she was tempted to wish that she had chanced all and spoken bravely then—but how could she know the future? She watched him uneasily as he strode back and forth but she had no comfort for him. Her hand trembled as she tried to thread the needle but the flickering light from the great torch that stood in a sconce at the foot of the staircase confused her sight and her eyes were full of tears. She rose hastily and went to her chamber.

For a little while she sat in the dark and tried to compose her thoughts to prayer. Of late her life had been one long terror lest her husband whom she loved should injure the son whom she loved also. Nothing but prayer had kept her patient and she alone knew the violence of the efforts she made to appear cheerful before Cedric. With a little cry she threw herself upon her knees to repeat once more the acts of resignation that she knew by experience would help her most, then she rose and hastened back to the Hall.

There were various people who claimed her attention; amongst others, Hilda stood by her chair for a few moments, ostensibly to render an account of her charge but also to tell her of the result of her mission. To crown her recital she told of the strange lights and stranger apparitions at St. Nicholas.

"Hush!" said the Dame gently, "tell it not abroad, Hilda. There be those about us who fear neither God nor demon. I would not that the rest of these poor souls should be troubled. 'Tis idle to raise curiosity, and belike the poor ghosts but plead for prayers, seeing that their requiems be stopped."

Hilda looked at her keenly, she could not discern any deeper meaning in the Dame's words, yet she suspected it. "Yet, Lady," she protested, "I saw the wraiths most clearly, they walked about the cliff over against the Towers of St. Nicholas."

"You cried not out?"

"Nay, Lady. I know not—yet methinks I did—I was beside myself with fear."

"Alack, poor Hilda! I verily believe that I would much rather meet a Catholic ghost than some living Protestants I know—and in the dark too."

The old woman smiled. "Nay then, Dame Margaret, I fear not greatly to meet a man, if he be one of the living kind, I be old and they be like to pass me by."

In spite of herself Dame Margaret laughed a little. "Go to, Hilda! you are past my teaching I can see. But be more wary how you go forth

alone in the future. Now good-night! for I see my tirewoman waiting for her turn."

So dismissed, the old woman retired to a seat at the further end of the Hall where two or three of the younger maids were gossiping in low tones.

The Franklin was deep in consultation with his new house steward. He had brought a man from Fordwich to fill Michael's place. Two or three of the older men who had expected to step into the vacancy were disappointed and the new steward had not found his position an enviable one. Moreover he was of the new religion and as such the old retainers considered him by nature a spy. The new man had already caused considerable uneasiness and anxiety to the Dame and to the old members of the household who found it increasingly difficult to keep up any regular religious observance.

Cedric looked up furtively from time to time, once he caught Hilda's gaze riveted on him. He looked away again quickly, but a few moments later when he caught her eye for the second time he rose hastily and changed his place so that he sat with his back to the old woman. Dame Margaret looked up just in time to see the scowl upon her husband's face and to see him change his seat, but though she looked to see the cause for his sudden move she could detect none.

They were startled with the banging of a door. It echoed through the empty house, for everyone was assembled in the Hall and it was nearly time for them to retire for the night. There was a

sudden movement of surprise and the low hum of conversation ceased. The voice of the steward could be plainly heard throughout the length of the Hall:

"Family worship, Franklin! there be no means so sure to bring about—" then he realized the silence and stopped speaking.

Dame Margaret rose as if to retire. At that moment strange noises were heard as if from the loft over their heads. The passing of footsteps and then a voice that rose in a wild weird song. They could not distinguish the words—but it sounded like the lament of some soul in pain.

Cedric sprang to his feet—"What means it?" he cried, then, as he saw the blanched faces that listened fearfully to the wild music a suspicion crossed his brain that he was going crazy.

Dame Margaret stood with one foot on the lowest step of the stairs; she had lost the power of motion for the time. With one hand she caught at the railing while the other was pressed close to her heart in mortal terror. The music continued, the motif appeared to be a very short one and oft repeated. It held them spellbound for a little while.

Cedric was the first to recover himself. "'Tis not in the loft!" he cried, "for 'tis locked securely. I locked it myself and put the key in safe keeping. It be some—"

He never finished the sentence, for a piercing shriek rang through the house and one of the maids tore down the stairs as if she were pursued:

"Oh! Oh!—The Wraith! the Wraith—" she cried and fell at the Dame's feet.

She awoke as if from a trance of horror and stooped to speak to the girl. The whole household had gathered around by this time. Cedric strove in vain to make himself heard for the cries and lamentations of the women filled the Hall. He could not even approach Margaret for they were all about her as though they had gone to her for protection.

The new steward stood white and shaking beside the dying fire, he dared even less than his master, to face the strange voice which he was persuaded belonged to the inhabitant of another world. He had his own interests to look to as well and could not afford to take unnecessary risks.

For a few more moments the wild song continued, then it died away slowly, seeming to retire into the distance until it ceased altogether.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUEEN OF THE GYPSIES.

ANDREW had been seen prowling around the Hall after dark by two of the gypsy lads whose turn it was to watch the precincts of St. Nicholas' Church. They had followed him unobserved and seen him in consultation with two strangers, but they had kept out of sight and hearing for Tirzah had forbidden them to take action of any kind without first referring the matter to her.

They hold that the gypsy woman had on the members of her lawless band was remarkable. She was at the same time, queen, counsellor, leader and doctor; firm in government and kindly, even tender, in seasons of suffering. She swayed alternately their childlike affections and their wild sense of justice. Hence their devotion to the Franklin who had saved her life, and the one amongst them who dared to dispute her authority would have fared ill at the hands of the rest of the tribe. She realized the power that she held, and it was that she might exercise it for the benefit of the Franklins that she had kept her conversion secret, and removed her dwelling to a little distance from the rest of her people, that she might be free to practice her new religion unobserved.

December had come in grey and dark, and now it wanted but a week of Christmas. Dame Gertrude had failed of late; the hardships of her life in the exposed hut had told upon her but she was bright and cheery though at times Etheldreda feared that it was but the flickering of a candle that was nearly burnt out. The Dame's busy wheel was silent now and she lay quietly on the heap of dried seaweed that served for a couch, when Tirzah entered the hut. Etheldreda rose to greet her and laid her finger warningly on her lips, beckoning to the gypsy to follow her outside.

"News? You bring news, Tirzah?" she asked anxiously.

The gypsy shook her head: "Nay, Mistress Etheldreda, unless this be news. Last night my watchers saw Andrew."

"Andrew?—the gardener's boy?"

"Ay, he who was the gardener's boy. He was prowling about in the dark around the Hall. My lads saw him deep in conversation with two strange men. They could not approach nearly enough to hear what was said for the men spoke in low tones, and warily."

"Andrew—! and two strangers? What think you of it, Tirzah? If it were the pursuivant's men they'd know better then to waste their time prowling about the Hall. The Franklin be of their own ilk—a good Protestant—and safe from their—"

Tirzah laughed: "Safe?" she said scornfully. "Nay, then, Mistress, you have a better opinion of the Queen and her friends than I. There's not a man of them all but would deliver his own

father to the pursuivant, an he might chance to get his estates."

"But—Uncle Cedric hath conformed—and it was the Queen's Grace herself who granted him my father's estates. He be safe enough, Tirzah," she said confidently.

"Nay, as for that, I trust not the Queen herself, Mistress. An some other offer her a better price, there be many ways to be rid of the Franklin."

"By false witness?"

"Ay, and by other means that Thomas Sherwood knoweth surely."

"You think the pursuivant be in this thing?"

"Ay, and some other—yet of that I be not sure—but who was it warned the Franklin of the pursuivant's visit?"

"Nay—I know not—yet, an I remember, he warned him not of the pursuivant's visit, but only of the priest's intended presence."

Tirzah glanced at the girl quickly: "Ay, that was it," she said, "I had forgot," and for the moment she appeared lost in thought. "I must contrive to see this boy," she said at length.

"And wherefore? Methinks it be scarce safe for you."

Tirzah drew herself up proudly: "Nay Mistress, the gypsy woman hath a tribe at her call, and she be obeyed by them, not as the Queen of England, for fear; but for love. She be in no danger, nor will be while her people remain faithful—and they will—no Romany betrays his own."

Etheldreda shook her head a little, she was scarcely able to accept Tirzah's valuation of the

tribe's fidelity. "Please God it may be so," she said, "but I must not stay here, Tirzah. I thank you for your warning—I will be wary, yet I wish that I might kindle a fire for the Dame suffers much from the cold. I fear me that she be failing of late, Tirzah."

The gypsy laid both her hands on Etheldreda's shoulders with a gesture of sympathy: "'Tis for the best, dear Lady," she said soothingly, "our lives be in God's hands, as you have ever told me. It may be that He would spare her a sharper trial, for the nets close in around us, Mistress Etheldreda; every day merry England grows less merry and more sorrowful; more blood flows; more tears are poured forth, while vice walks boldly abroad and flaunts itself in high places, and religion be dragged through the mire. Be brave, dear Mistress, so I have learned from you and from—my godmother—Dame Gertrude." She lingered a little, half affectionately, half proudly, on the title that bound her to the Lady of Ethendene.

Etheldreda pressed her hand in token of sympathy: "Thank God, you be of the true Faith now, Tirzah," she said.

"Ay, Mistress, I do indeed, and for your sakes, who brought me to it, I pray that he will bring good out of all this evil."

"Good, Tirzah," repeated the girl sadly, "I see naught of good to follow it. An the Dame, my mother, sinks under her load of sorrows 'twill not be years that have silvered her hair, nor dimmed her eyes, nor stolen the beauty from her form—not years, Tirzah—only sorrows—and sorrows that

need not have been, save for the hand of my father's brother." She turned away, for her eyes were full of tears and she would not have the gypsy see them.

Tirzah was profoundly moved, for the priest's mother was very dear to her Romany heart, not alone for the sake of the son who had saved her life, but also for her own beautiful calmness and sweetness that had impressed the wild nature of the gypsy as no other qualities could have done.

The Dame's voice came to them softly from within the hut: "Tirzah!" she called, and the gypsy entered leaving Etheldreda without.

"I be here, Dame Gertrude," she replied gently, kneeling beside the old lady as she spoke.

The Dame had risen to a sitting posture, she was shuddering with cold so that her teeth chattered. Tirzah drew the wrappings of the bed more closely about her: "I wish that I might kindle a fire," she said, "but I be afraid lest the smoke betray us." For a moment she was silent, a thought seemed to suggest itself to her: "I go now, Dame, she said, "I will return anon."

She slipped from the hut, passed through a narrow cleft in the cliff behind it and along a sort of tunnel enclosing a kind of rude stairway hewn out of the chalk. She threaded this passage for some distance, it was quite dark but she knew every step of the way, and after a short climb she reached a door of planks. This she unbarred and admitted herself into the interior of the little hut among the bushes where she had lately taken up her residence.

She had accidently discovered this passage which was a sort of natural tunnel in the chalk, and with the aid of some men of the tribe, had made it available as a means of access to the seashore. The fall of the cliffs had somewhat altered her plans, but she had been able to restore it sufficiently to make it a useful and safe approach to Dame Gertrude's retreat.

Having secured the door, which was just large enough for her to crawl through on her hands and knees, she prepared to leave the hut, and taking a basket on her arm, she glided through the bushes until she was at the opposite side of the thicket from Ethendene. Walking swiftly she came to a gap in the cliffs, which formed a natural approach to the sands below. With the ease of a goat she scrambled down the side until she came to the bottom, where there was a black, lean-to cottage built close against the steep wall of chalk behind it.

There was a mound of brown earth beside the little house from which a light bluish smoke rose slowly. Tirzah knocked lightly on the door, there was no answer for a moment though she had heard the hum of voices within, but when she repeated her signal a head was thrust cautiously forth and when the owner of the cottage saw the gypsy he came out, leaving the door open behind him:

"Tirzah! as I live! What can I do for you?" he asked, with an attempt to be genial, but his little restless eyes belied his manner.

"I would have charcoal, Master Brown," she re-

plied, "the day be chill and I would carry it to a sick woman."

"Who be sick?" he asked carelessly.

"An old blind body, over against the water."

"Well, well! it be hard to be poor and blind too. Belike she hath no friends or you'd not be visiting her. Just take what you need—or I'll fill your basket for you," he said as he groped in a sort of storehouse contrived under the flooring of the cottage, which was of boards and raised somewhat above the sand, so that the place was above the water level in the winter storms.

The other occupant of the cottage strolled to the door. For a moment Tirzah was at fault. He was evidently a stranger. He was tall, a little stooped, of dark complexion with a half-grown beard. His suit of russet was set off with a ruff, he wore gloves and carried a switch. He spoke, and recognition leaped into her eyes so that she turned them hastily away. The charcoal-burner had brought the fuel to her and declined the payment she offered him.

"'Tis but a trifle, and for the poor, I give it freely," he said, then as she thanked him, he pointed to his guest: "An you would requite me somewhat, guide this good man to Ethendene woods. He hath strayed from the Canterbury road and would fain continue his journey."

Tirzah bowed to the stranger: "An you will come with me, I will put you on the road," she said. "I thank you for your charity, Master Brown. Come, sir, the way be not long; half an hour's walk should bring you to the Canterbury road."

She went up swiftly and cat-like and reached the top of the cliff before him; he was out of breath when he gained her side: "'Tis a steep climb!" he said.

"Ay—Andrew," she replied.

He turned to her with a frown: "You know me?" he asked.

"Ay," she laughed, "I know you; what be you doing now? Methinks the gardener's boy be something of a peacock now. Go you to Ethendene?"

He shook his head: "Nay, Tirzah—stay! what was that? Suffer me to walk behind you—so—" He went to the other side of her so that she was between him and the Hall which they were rapidly nearing. "Nay—I be not going to the Hall," he said. "I—I—would rather not—I left suddenly—and the Franklin be a stern man—not like his brother of blessed memory."

"His brother? You knew not the late Franklin."

"Nay. I was never in his service; yet I have often seen him."

"You left suddenly?" she said turning to him again.

"Ay, I left suddenly," he repeated after her, and struck at the dead grasses with his switch.

"And you have been—where?"

"Nay, I tell that to none; 'tis my affair."

"And you return to—to Canterbury," she asked insinuatingly.

"Nay, I stay here, by your leave, and by your leave I'll give you good-day, Tirzah! I know the road well enough, yet I was mindful not to tell

yon charcoal-burner all I knew. I was wishful for your company too—for I like not these gypsy lads hereabouts, an I be alone.” He plunged into the wood as he spoke and in a moment was lost to view but she listened to the sound of his footsteps until they died away in the distance. Then she turned back, skirted the wood and so to the thicket again. The return through the tunnel was soon accomplished.

“Here be charcoal, Dame,” she said almost gaily, as she set about kindling it in an earthen pan that she had brought with her. In a little while she succeeded in getting the coals to glow and placed the pan by the Dame’s side. “It be going to snow presently,” she announced, “and then you shall have a fire.”

“God reward you, Tirzah,” replied the Dame, “and send one to care for you in your old age.”

“Nay, ’tis but little that I can do for you, Dame. I would that it might be more.”

“There be but one thing that I crave: if only my son might come to me. I could die content did I but have the Holy Sacraments to help me. I feel that the end be near; I be glad to go, Tirzah, glad.”

“Mother!” cried Etheldreda, sinking upon her knees, “mother! go not yet. Indeed I would not be selfish—you have suffered enough—and yet—I would not have you leave me.”

“Nay, child,” said the Dame, feeling for her, “come nearer to me. I know what you would say—yet—think, dear one! To change this darkness for the light of Heaven; this suffering for glory. And the time passes so swiftly. Some

happy day in Heaven they'll come and bid me hasten to the gate to welcome you. *That* should be worth waiting for, my child. It won't be long before you come to me."

Etheldreda knelt silently by her side with her arms about her and the dear head pillowed upon her breast. She would not weep lest she might pain that loved mother. After a time Dame Gertrude spoke:

"Let me lie down again, child," she said, "I would fain sleep, the charcoal hath warmed me somewhat. I would thank you again, Tirzah!"

But the gypsy queen was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

ON the Saturday before Christmas the Franklin went away attended by his house-steward. Dame Margaret forebore to question him and he said nothing of his intentions, yet she somehow thought that he had gone to Fordwich to give testimony of his loyalty to the Queen by assisting at the services in the parish church.

She shed a few more tears than usual in the privacy of her chamber, for the thought of his apostacy was increasingly bitter to her, but she made no protest and strove to smile at him when she stood at the door to bid him farewell.

That day and the following Sunday passed peacefully. She assembled the household and read the Mass prayers from her missal that she took from its hiding place behind the wainscoting of her chamber. After that was done she spoke to them wisely, instructing them in the truths of Faith and urging on them firmness and fidelity. Her courage almost failed her as she thought of Cedric, of the hunted priest, of the blind widow of the lawful owner of Ethendene, yet she mastered her emotion sufficiently to finish her instruction

and then they knelt once more and recited the rosary for the weak, the tempted, and the persecuted of their Faith. A few moments of silent prayer followed before she dismissed them gently.

They fled from the Hall with a new love for the gentle lady who was fighting such an unequal battle with the Powers of Darkness and the enemy who was of her own household.

Dame Margaret retired to her chamber. From the casement she could see the Towers of St. Nicholas' Church that stood out darkly, as though in protest against the oppression of the faith of Christ. It seemed to her a fitting type of religious troubles of the time that were slowly but surely driving the Church from the land, as though the unhappy country would fain throw it into the sea. For a long while she mused and the beads of her rosary passed lovingly through her hands. They would have to be hidden presently, yet for the moment she indulged herself by holding them.

One by one the women stole up to her for a few words of affectionate counsel. With the unerring instinct of simple folk they had discovered her big mother heart and she had become the recipient of their confidence. Hilda had waited until the last.

"Come in, Hilda!" said the Dame as the old woman followed her knock by opening the door. Hilda closed the door carefully.

"Be seated, Hilda," said the Dame graciously, "I be glad to see you. How be your rheumatism?"

"Nay, I came not to talk of my rheumatism," replied the old woman, seating herself by the Dame's side, "I bring you a message from Tirzah, the gypsy."

"From Tirzah? Nay then, speak low—what says Tirzah?"

"She bids you be merry for that she hath contrived joy for you. She says not what it be, but bids you be of good heart. Doth the Franklin return to-morrow?"

"Nay, I know not, Hilda. I think not, yet I be not sure. And Tirzah will tell me nothing of her mystery?"

"Nothing, Dame. Belike there be nothing much to tell; these gypsies be over fond of mysteries," said Hilda with a comical little shake of her head.

"Then we must needs wait, Hilda. If the joy be indeed such, then 'twill be all the sweeter, and if it be other, then 'twill keep." Hilda laughed, a dry little old-age laugh and rose to go. "Nay, must you go so soon; well, then, farewell."

Hilda stooped suddenly and kissed the Dame's fingers: "God keep you, Lady!" she said, "and bring you out of your troubles."

Margaret flushed a little. Hilda had touched a sore spot, gently it is true, but she winced. "Amen!" she responded, and added: "You will pray for me and mine?"

"Ay, Lady! so I do—so I do! yet the Lord be long in answering; belike He hath not gotten to my prayers yet."

The Dame smiled: "Nay then, I'll pray that

he get to them quickly," she said as Hilda turned to go.

The old woman was the last, and now that she had seen them all, she felt free to satisfy her own devotion. The beads slipped slowly through her fingers as she knelt weaving a garland about the feet of Heaven's Queen that was none the less acceptable to her that it rose from the torn heart of a mother.

At last she rose and laid the missal and the beads in the safe hiding-place she had contrived behind the wainscoting. The light was gone and she descended to the Great Hall.

"Pile on more logs," she said, as she seated herself on the long settle. Her tirewoman came and spoke to her in a low tone, the Dame started:

"I'll see her now," she said, and Tirzah entered. "Come hither, Tirzah! 'tis long since you were here, come tell me now, what brings you hither? Of a truth," she added, dropping her voice, "I be somewhat more than curious since Hilda came to me this afternoon with tidings of a joy—It sounded like Christmas forsooth!"

Tirzah had seated herself at the Dame's invitation and they conversed in low tones while supper was making ready. Dame Margaret rose and went to her place at the table, desiring the gypsy to sit next to Hilda. The absence of Cedric gave them a sort of freedom and there was a clatter of tongues that only the Dame's presence restrained from roughness. She ate nothing and there was a look of anxious gladness in her eyes

that Hilda noted, and a sort of feverishness. As soon as the meal was over she retired, leaving Hilda to preside over the evening gathering at the fireside.

She stood to listen for a moment at the head of the stairs, but all was silent and she went to her chamber like one in a dream. The door was already open; and there was a little rush, and Walter folded her in his arms.

"Mother! mother!" he exclaimed softly. For a few moments neither of them could speak, then the boy closed the door softly. "Come to the window," he said, "'tis dark but I would see your face in the moonlight."

"There be no moon, silly boy!"

"Nay, but there *be*—a young moon, mother! See! it creeps up and up over the shrubby trees and it has been snowing. See! all the world be white and joyous. I have wearied for you," he went on more slowly, "yet there hath been no chance for me to come. While father keeps in the same mind 'twould not be safe. An I must die, I must; but I would not that he be the executioner." She shuddered: "Nay, mother mine, I was a brute to speak of such things—forgive me, dear."

For answer she took both his hands in hers and kissed his brow: "And now, tell me, Walter, I would know what passed between you and your father."

"'Twas but that he asked me to conform, to go with him to Fordwich and take the sacrament.

I told him to ask me anything else but not that, and then he threatened me."

"Ay, I had that much from him; and that he beat you, Walter."

He laughed. "I should be a strange boy did I not have to take a chastising now and then," he said.

"Nay, but there was somewhat more," she persisted.

"And if 'twas so, 'tis over now, and the pain forgot. Let us forget it, mother. An all goes well I'll to Douay soon and there'll be a few years of peace in a safe haven."

She caught him to her again: "When?" she gasped. She had found him only to lose him again.

"In the new year, an they get me not before," he said lightly.

"In the new year?—then—this—"

"Ay, mother! this be farewell," he said and held a warning finger to her lips.

Voices came up from below and the sounds of horses—and Cedric's voice.

Walter clasped her closely once more: "God keep you, mother!" he whispered, and left her.

At the head of the staircase he came face to face with his father. He had grown taller during his illness; his face was longer and thinner; his hands bore the marks that his father had put upon them. The uncertain light revealed some of these things; Cedric's conscience distorted and exaggerated them. The boy passed him in silence

only looking at him earnestly as he walked slowly onward in the direction of the loft.

A woman's shriek added to the mystery. The Franklin's knees trembled under him, he stood for a moment white and trembling—then he turned and fled!

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK TO ETHENDENE.

TIRZAH stepped softly from bush to bush, following the shadowy form of Andrew who appeared to be walking warily toward the Hall and stopping every few paces as though to listen for the coming of some person. Apparently he heard nothing, for he continued to go forward until he reached the deep shadow cast by the old chapel. There she lost sight of him, and though she waited for the best part of an hour he did not appear again.

It was just past midnight when she resolved to give up the quest. The snow had begun to fall but the night was calm and it fell softly and evenly but steadily too, so that very soon it had formed a white carpet over the open marshland that brought two figures clearly into view. She stole around in the shelter of the wood until she got near them; they were evidently quarreling about something and she started once when she recognized the voices.

It was a long time before she could distinguish the words, then the second man made some quick rejoinder and walked forward slowly toward the gypsy's cover.

"And what if I did? I did no wrong, Sir Thomas, I warned not the priest, only the man I deemed that I had betrayed. As for the priest 'twas your affair."

"Yet, had you not sent the Franklin speeding homeward I might have taken the priest red-handed."

"Nay, that be your own affair, Sir Thomas. You forced me to treachery once—I would not be your cat's paw, nor any other man's again. An you deal not fairly by me in this matter I will e'en to the Queen's Grace and chance what comes of it."

"To your own undoing? Nay, you be but a gardener's boy, friend Andrew, go back to your spade. I was a fool to think that I could make a man of the like of you."

"As well of me as of others, Sir Thomas," he said meaningly, and Tirzah smiled to herself, for the pursuivant's father had been a saddler's apprentice in his youth and it was an unexpected stroke of fortune that had placed him in a position to educate his son.

The two men had turned into the path that led back through the wood to the Canterbury Road. She held her breath and stood more closely into the shadow as they passed her, and as soon as they were at a safe distance she emerged from her shelter and hastened away to her little hut among the bushes.

She was weary as she shook the snow from her cloak, yet she would not wait to rest and, having secured the outer door, she removed the shutter

that closed the entrance to her tunnel and crept through it. Then she stumbled forward in the darkness nearly missing one of the rude steps now and then, but reached the opening that lay to the back of the hut in safety.

She groped for the door and slipped in quietly. The Dame lay very white and still in the flickering light of the pine logs that Etheldreda had kindled. She stirred a little as the gypsy woman came to her side but she was only half aroused and slept again almost immediately.

"Has Father Franklin been in yet?" whispered Tirzah softly.

"Nay, Tirzah. You told him?" she asked. The gypsy drew her aside:

"I sent him a message, Mistress Etheldreda. We be watched. Andrew be come back and be in league with the pursuivant, yet I know not how far he will go with him. Pray God that nothing chances to your brother while Dame Gertrude lives. 'Twould perchance kill her. Yet I think that she can scarce last long—she be weaker than she was."

"Ay. She be weaker, Tirzah. I grieve to bid her farewell, yet 'tis almost a joy to know that she will be beyond this—"

"I know, I know, dear Mistress. Now I will watch a while; pray you sleep for an hour or two; I'll call you an any change come."

The gypsy took the cloak from her shoulders as she spoke and laid it down upon the earthen floor for the girl to lie upon. Etheldreda was too worn out to make any objection and was

soon asleep while Tirzah knelt by the Dame's side and watched patiently.

It was thus that Walter found them when he crept in at dawn to inquire for the Dame. "How be she, Tirzah?" he asked softly, for Etheldreda still slept.

"Nay, Master Walter, she be like to go at any time. Bid the priest come to her to-night if he would not be too late. She'll last till then but after that I look to see her go suddenly."

"He comes to-night in any case. He sent me now to bid you be ready. All being well he will say Mass here at midnight; this be Christmas Eve, you have not forgot, Tirzah?"

"Nay, I have not forgot, Master Walter."

"And you will set a watch, will you not?" he went on quickly.

"Ay. Tell Father Franklin that I will set a watch; but bid him be wary for there be a plot afoot to take him. An the Dame were not so near her end I would not suffer him to run the risk, but she'll not last long now, Master Walter, and mayhap 'tis best so."

"It be—it be, Tirzah. I'll tell Father Franklin; you'll be here too? Remember it's Christmas Eve."

"I'd be here even were it not Christmas. The Franklin will say Mass?"

"Surely—and I'll serve it; it may be for the last time before I leave for Douay."

"Pray God you get safely away, Master," she said as she closed the door after him.

She had swept up the hut and thrown turfs

on the red embers that still lay about the hearth when Etheldreda awoke.

"It grows light, Tirzah!" she whispered rising and crossing over to the bed. "'Twas passing thoughtless of me to suffer you to watch. You have not slept all night!"

"Nay, I had many thoughts to keep me waking, Mistress. But I have news for you."

"News! that may be good or ill; which be it, Tirzah?"

"The Franklin says Mass here at midnight, Mistress. 'Twas Master Walter brought the tidings; I bade him tell the priest to come."

"And mother? She hath not awakened?"

"She hath not stirred, this sleep will do her good."

"And to see Harold again may make her well, Tirzah."

"In spirit, Mistress."

"Nay, I meant bodily."

"I think it not. Hark to me, Mistress Etheldreda," went on the gypsy, throwing her arm affectionately about the girl's shoulder. "'Twill be best so. You would not wish her to live that she might bear another sorrow?"

"No. But—you say another sorrow. There be only Harold and me—be Harold in any danger now?"

"Any priest be in danger, Mistress. The Franklin be a priest; an he fly not he'll be taken, sooner or later."

"Franklins fly not, Tirzah. Yet Harold be a

Franklin. O, God!" she cried, covering her face with her hands, "how long, how long?"

"Nay weep not; the hours be short. Later you'll find time to weep, Mistress. Come, you will wake Dame Gertrude, you would not sadden her?"

"Nay, Tirzah. See, I be brave! But indeed sorrows crowd so upon us. Old Michael may be envied, yet his passing leaves us unguarded."

"Alack! poor soul. Yet methinks he be at peace. His eighty years were too heavy a burden for his hunted life—and he had the comforts of religion at the last."

"Ay! tell me how he died. Since you conveyed him hence the Dame hath been so weak I have had no thought for any other."

"'Twas last night, Mistress, that they laid him to rest. The night before he wakened and cried out and Father Franklin went to him and soothed him. Then, at dawn, he offered the Holy Mass, and brought him the Blessed Sacrament. At sunrise he anointed him with the holy oil and then he knelt beside him and commended his soul to Heaven. He passed so gently that none knew the moment of his going."

"'Twas a blessed ending! I can almost hear the Master's word: 'Well Done.' And they laid him at St. Nicholas', Tirzah?"

"Ay, in one of the farthest vaults, and sealed his tomb with broken slabs."

"There be no name on his grave, Tirzah, yet when the resurrection sounds 'twill not be unknown. Poor Michael!"

"Nay, happy Michael, to have persevered to the end."

"You do well to chide me, Tirzah. But see, mother wakes, she calls me. Good-morrow, mother! You have slept bravely; methinks you should be refreshed."

"Ay, child, I thank you. Did I hear Tirzah's voice?"

"I be here, Dame," replied the gypsy, taking the sick woman's hand.

"Thank you, Tirzah. I have somewhat to ask of you."

"Nay, Lady, command me; your will be my law."

"Yet in this I command not, I only ask that when I be no longer you will take her and hasten with all speed to France. I was at the Convent of St. Denis in my youth; leave my child with the Sisters there. They'll mother her for me. Evil days have come upon England and a lone maid be in sore peril. There be a few jewels hidden in the place you know of. Enough to pay your way."

The Dame's voice failed and she lay back panting a little. Tirzah raised her head: "An the Lord permits, it shall be as you will, Dame," she said solemnly, then her voice broke and she rose and went away.

The snow continued to fall thick and fast upon the hut and on the ground around it; through all that day it never ceased falling and when the dark fell it lay like a great white blanket upon everything and deadened all sounds so that Ethel-

dreda was startled by a sudden knock. She went to the door at once:

"Harold!" she cried, but he silenced her with a gesture and going forward dropped on his knees by the bed.

The Dame put out her hands: "Harold, dear son," she said joyfully. He took them in his and bent to kiss them.

"Mother!" that was the only word, for she spoke again.

"The time grows short, Father, I would confess," she said. Etheldreda had wrapped her cloak about her and retired to Tirzah's passage. It was very cold. Once she thought that she could hear voices overhead but when after listening attentively for a few moments, she heard no more, she decided that it was an illusion and tried to compose her thoughts to prayer.

It seemed a long while; in reality it was but a few moments before the priest opened the door and called to her softly. She went back in the hut. Dame Gertrude lay placid and serene, the priest was about to anoint her, and the girl knelt in a sort of dream close beside the door. Now that the end was at hand she felt numb; yet she followed every detail of the holy rite.

Tirzah stole in softly followed by Walter and they knelt with her. Dame Gertrude appeared to have forgotten everything earthly, even her mother-love was in abeyance to her reverence for the minister of God. His voice faltered now and then, yet there was a sort of exaltation about him too, as though with that

exercise of his priestly powers, he had reached his height of privilege that night. Etheldreda wondered how he could be so calm; yet she was less disturbed than he, had she known it.

Tirzah was uneasy and knelt between Etheldreda and the door; Walter was close beside the priest. The supreme moment came and Dame Gertrude received the Sacred Host for the last time. She lay still for a while, her lips moved slowly; even the priest would not disturb her devotion. She unclasped her hands after a time and turned her face toward them:

"Your blessing, Father," she murmured. He raised his hand as he gave her the last blessing and absolution of the Church. They gathered more closely about her then while the priest recited the prayers for the departing soul. Suddenly the blind woman opened her eyes:

"Hugh!" she cried, "Hugh! I come, dear husband!" and stretched forth her arms. For a moment she remained thus, then the light faded, her arms fell, the grey shadow overspread her face. With a last effort she looked at them, and with a thrill of awe they knew that she *saw* them: "Farewell," she whispered, her eyes closed again and she slept in peace.

It was the death of a saint. For a long while they knelt on half unconscious of outer things until the priest began in a broken voice the "*De profundis*," the prayer for a departed soul. Then Etheldreda's tears burst forth and she threw herself into the gypsy woman's arms.

Father Franklin bent to kiss the dead woman's

brow and crossed her hands over her broken heart; then he went to his sister.

"Weep not over much, Etheldreda," he said. "See, our mother be at rest. I verily believe that she be in Heaven this minute, for surely through much tribulation she hath entered the Kingdom of God. Heaven send us all courage to live—and to die—like her."

The girl raised her face to him imploringly, she could not reply just then but she held out her hand to him. He took it and led her to the bedside. Together they stood there for a few moments.

Tirzah spoke softly: "Father, there be those abroad would trap you this night. You will go now?"

"Nay, Tirzah. How can I leave my sister alone?"

"You peril her, Franklin, an you stay."

Etheldreda moved more closely to his side: "I would not have you stay an it be unsafe, Harold. Go with Tirzah, she will contrive to hide you."

"And leave you here alone? Nay, that were scarce right to my thinking, Etheldreda."

"An you stay, you cannot protect me, Harold. Go, dear brother, before it be too late. An the pursuivant comes he will find but a woman watching beside her dead. She will protect me—" she added, pointing to the dead form on the bed.

Walter had already stolen out to watch at Tirzah's sign. He returned now breathless:

"Fly, Father!" he said, "they be come—hasten. Tirzah, stay with Etheldreda—I go with Father Franklin."

He was too late. Even as he spoke they heard stealthy footsteps without and the low voices of men. Etheldreda clung to her brother in terror for a moment. He put her swiftly behind him and beckoned for the gypsy to come to her, but none of them spoke. The pursuivants had found the door but it was secured by the heavy bar which Tirzah had contrived to replace.

For a few moments it resisted their blows—then, with a crash, it fell inward, striking the gypsy to the ground. Etheldreda shrieked and threw herself upon the ground beside her.

"She be killed!" she cried. The priest turned and knelt beside her. The heavy door had crashed into her head and the blood poured from a gaping wound. She made no sound and for a moment he thought her dead, but he raised his hand in absolution. She opened her eyes once and looked at him and strove to speak—"First body—then soul—all yours, Franklin," they were her last words for in another moment she had ceased to breathe.

In the meantime, Walter had contrived to hold the pursuivant's men at bay. Standing in front of the dying woman he demanded their authority for the intrusion.

"The warrant of the Queen's Grace, stripling!" replied Sir Thomas Sherwood, stamping off the snow from his feet. "Come, out of the way there! Or you'll mayhap accompany your friend the priest to—" he made a quick gesture expressive of hanging.

"I appeal to your humanity, Sir Thomas," he

said, laying a persuasive hand on the pursuivant's sleeve, "Dame Franklin be but just dead; she passed an hour since. See!" he went on, leading the astonished man to the bedside, "there be no prayers going on here, save such as the Queen's Grace would most heartily approve. When Heaven takes a man's mother, he must needs pray, an he be a man." Sir Thomas Sherwood's lip curled:

"Yet, the son be a seminary priest, and as such he must hang. His life be forfeit to the law—and that of those who harbored him."

"Nay as for that, she who harbored him be dead already. I pray you suffer him to go—or hold me in his stead, an you needs must take a prisoner hence with you."

"Nay, I hold you in any case, Master Franklin," he said with a coarse laugh.

The boy started and bit his lip, then he passed to the priest's side:

"I am your comrade in this adventure, it seems," he said.

"Nay, Walter—" the pursuivant interposed—

"Come, come! enough of this," he cried. "You go with me, Harold Franklin, for that being a seminary priest you have dared to pervert the Queen's lieges—and the boy goes too for that he be the son of a traitor—and over bold for his years to boot."

"Nay, Sir Thomas—an I surrender to you—be content. The lad be but a boy yet and he hath a mother."

"The worse for her that she hath so ill-trained her son. Come hither!" he cried to two of his

men who stood on guard at the door. "Come! bind me the prisoners! and the boy too. See to it that you keep them safe, for, an they escape you, your lives shall answer to the Queen's Grace."

Etheldreda had been standing speechless and numb with terror, but when she saw the men seize and bind her brother she came forward hastily and threw her arms about him as though she would protect him.

"Take me too, Thomas Sherwood!" she cried, "I be a lone woman with none to protect me."

He laughed: "Nay, Mistress, an you be a woman you may go free. You be fair and there be those will be willing to shelter you. Content you that I suffer you to go free—for the Queen's sake."

She shuddered at his words. The priest whispered to her to be of good heart: "God keep you, little sister," he said, "to Him I confide you. Trust in Him."

At a sign from the pursuivant they tore her from him and flung her to the ground between the two dead occupants of the hut. Something seemed to snap in her brain and unconsciousness came mercifully to her relief.

The rugged path that led to the summit of the cliff was slippery with ice. It was a steep and difficult climb for the men; and their prisoners, whose hands were bound, found it well nigh impossible to keep their footing since they could not help themselves. The priest fell once and but for the quickness of the man who walked at his

side he must have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

"I thank you, friend," he said, as he struggled to his feet.

"Nay, thank me not," returned the man gruffly, "it might have been an easier fate than the one in store for you."

The priest smiled: "Nevertheless, I thank you, friend," he said again. "Methinks my hour be not come yet."

"Silence! speak not with the prisoners," thundered the pursuivant as he gave orders to remount, for the whole party had now reached the summit of the cliff where they found the rest of the men who had been left to guard the horses and to cut off the retreat of any person who might attempt flight.

The two prisoners were compelled to walk in the centre of the troop who fell in in two lines to their right and left. Sir Thomas Sherwood who brought up the rear on his great black horse gave the order to go forward.

"I'll get you horses anon!" he cried to the prisoners, "but in the meantime it mayhap that a walk through the snow will cool your courage somewhat."

A hot reply rose to Walter's lips and he turned his head sharply, but Father Franklin contrived to tread on his foot warningly, and he held back the retort. Their progress was but slow for the snow was deep and even the horses lagged somewhat. The boy walked bravely, striving to keep

pace with the priest but he stumbled from time to time.

"Courage, Walter," whispered Father Franklin in his ear. "See, we go toward Ethendene— 'Tis likely that we stay there until day."

The priest's surmise proved to be correct for they drew gradually nearer the Hall, and finally entered the courtyard where the pursuivant threw himself from his horse and demanded admission "in the Queen's name."

There was a stir within the house and a head was thrust from an upper window.

"Open! in the Queen's name!" repeated the pursuivant. In a few moments the house steward and a couple of serving men unbarred the great door and Cedric Franklin came forward haughtily to demand the cause of this unseasonable intrusion into his house. He started back when his eyes fell upon the figure of the priest—and when they passed to the face of his son at Father Franklin's side he paled to the lips.

Dame Margaret had risen and stood on the lowest step of the staircase. For a moment the flickering light of the torches confused her—then she saw her son. The priest's peril meant nothing to her—she had not realized that Walter was a prisoner, and she rushed forward and folded him in her arms.

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH MAIMED RIGHTS.

FOR a moment no one interfered. Cedric had not yet grasped the fact that his son lived. He had never spoken his name since the Sunday night when he had seen him at the head of the stairs. The relief of finding the guilt of his death lifted from his soul went far toward making him forget the boy's present peril. For a few moments he could not collect himself sufficiently to utter a word and when at last he found his voice it seemed to him hollow and strange—like a voice heard in sickness that sounds far off.

The pursuivant had taken advantage of the moment's confusion caused by the sudden appearance of Dame Margaret to set a watch at the outer door. Now he advanced to the Franklin with extended hand. Cedric affected not to see it.

"By what authority?" he began, then, as he saw the contempt in the man's face, he faltered, turned aside and hid his face in his trembling hands.

"Tush, man!" cried Sherwood insolently, "there be no need for you to tremble, your skin's safe enough. As for the boy, an you killed him not,

'twas that he was reserved to hang. Bid your good Dame to her chamber, for indeed I care not to war with a woman."

Dame Margaret looked around; there was none to stand by her; Cedric was trembling, and muttering, and praying by turns. She clung to her son as though she would save him in spite of them all. Father Franklin turned to her at the last:

"Go to your chamber, Dame, 'tis no fit place for you," he said compassionately. She looked at him dully for an instant but his gaze compelled her and she went.

Afterward she wondered how she had lived through the anguish of that night. She was too stunned to pray but force of habit drove her to her knees in a tearless agony that yet left her senses keenly on the alert. She could hear the rough jests and coarse oaths of the pursuivant's men as they bivouaced for the night in the Great Hall. Once—after all was quiet—she heard Walter's voice, as though the boy dreamed in his sleep—" 'Tis the fortune of war"—then a murmur that she could not catch; and then: "if thus I may gain my Father's soul," she heard him say.

She rose fearfully and peered into the darkness below. The torches had burnt down nearly to their sockets but the flickering light fell full on the upturned face of Walter as he lay peacefully sleeping between his guards at the foot of the great staircase. For a little while she gazed fondly on the face of her boy, and then she crept back to her chamber and sat silently by the casement

watching the first grey shafts of light creep upward into the clear sky, striving to school herself to suffer and be still.

The snow had ceased, all the world lay white and peaceful, even the traces of the night's arrival had been covered from sight. The clouds had cleared away too and the morning broke bright and frosty. There were sounds of life below stairs. She began to wonder why Cedric did not come to her and then she heard the horses being led to the door. The prisoners were brought forth and mounted on two of the Franklin's horses.

"'Tis a very simple matter, Franklin," she heard the pursuivant say. "An the lad conform, there be naught against him. I do but carry him with me to chastise his too ready speech."

And the reply—sadly spoken—not like the Franklin's wonted tones:

"Nay, I fear me you have mistook the lad. He hath a pretty spirit—and he be somewhat reckless as becomes his years for he be but a boy. An you'll leave him with me I'll persuade him; the Queen's Grace would scorn to war with a child."

"As you did not. Marry, you may start! You warred with women; an old woman, and blind and forsooth! and a child. The old woman be dead in the place where I captured my prisoners beside an old hag of a gypsy who strove to hinder me in mine office. The girl lay between them still enough. She be dead too for all I know."

Dame Margaret pressed her hands to her heart. So Dame Gertrude was dead, and Tirzah. What of Etheldreda? She pressed more closely to the

casement overturning a stool as she did so. Walter looked up. He was pale but his eyes looked steadily into hers as he raised his cap but he did not speak lest his mother might be subjected to further insults. The priest noted his gesture and his eyes followed it. There was a depth of anxiety in them that she understood for she connected it immediately with the last words of the pursuivant. Her lips formed the word: "Etheldreda?" and he bowed his head. She contrived to reassure him by a gesture and then they rode away.

The Franklin still stood bareheaded at the top of the steps when she joined him. The troop was already at a little distance and the men had closed in around the prisoners so that they were lost to view. The Dame's sudden touch on his arm startled him:

"Come in, Cedric!" she said. "Come in, for there be business afoot. You must seek Etheldreda with all speed; an Sir Thomas Sherwood spoke truly the girl be in deadly peril."

"Nay, but I know not where to seek her, Dame. The traces of last night's ride be all wiped out for the snow be three feet deep."

"To horse! to horse, Cedric! Take the men with you; go right and left; I'll wager you'll not have to seek far. There be gypsies now by St. Nicholas Church, an Tirzah indeed be slain, they'll aid you for hate of the pursuivant."

The need for action came to her as a blessing, she even contrived to inspire Cedric with some of her energy and he ordered his horse. The old

man who stood at his elbow hurried away in the direction of the stables—they could hear his voice and the trampling of a horse—the air was very still. When he came forth he was leading a big black horse that limped painfully:

“Nay, but I said *my* horse. Saddle the grey mare!” shouted the Franklin.

The old man shook his head: “They be all gone off, Franklin. There be none but me and the boy left—and they’ve taken the horses too.”

“When?”

“I know not, unless it may be that they crept away under cover of Sir Thomas Sherwood’s troop.”

“This be another of their tricks! Belike ’twas the boy, Andrew. Methinks ’tis an old game of his. Well, an I needs must, I must—” his hand was on the bridle of the sorry horse; he turned to Dame Margaret to address her but the words died on his lips—

“Look, Franklin!” she said.

Across the white waste beyond the shrubbery came a little party of men. They appeared to be bearing a litter suspended from their shoulders. Behind them came another group also carrying some object. For a few moments the Franklin watched their approach for it was evident that they were coming to the Hall. Hilda crept to Dame Margaret’s side followed by her tirewoman—there was a sense of expectation upon them all.

Slowly the little procession came along and entered the shrubbery traversing the winding path that led into the courtyard.

The Franklin by a gesture ordered the opening of the great doors and waited in the entrance for his visitors. And thus—borne on the shoulders of gypsy outlaws, Dame Gertrude came back to Ethendene.

And she never left it again, for in the dead of night they laid her to rest beside the faithful Tirzah in the vaults beneath the old chapel with such reverence as they could.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

FATHER FRANKLIN had been conveyed to London, for Sherwood had represented the case as one of unusual difficulty introducing the friendly spirit of the gypsies as a menace to the peace of the realm. Thus he achieved his object of keeping Walter's place of imprisonment concealed from the Franklin, for in London, amongst so many prisoners, a boy more or less made but little difference.

For the first few weeks the priest and Walter occupied the same cell and they spent the precious hours in preparing for the worst.

In March the priest had been bidden to prepare for his trial and they took the boy away, leaving him alone.

Walter was startled and threw himself at Father Franklin's feet as he bade him farewell:

"The hour is come, Father—pray for me," he whispered as the priest bent down to him from his seat on the stone bench which was the only furniture the cell contained.

"Hush, dear lad! be of good courage— 'Twill be but for a little while at the worst." He traced the sign of the cross on the boy's forehead then

raised him and led him to the door where the turnkey stood with his back considerably turned to them. The man had been won to the priest by the brave spirit in which he had endured all the hardships of his imprisonment and the youth and delicacy of the boy had gained compassion.

They spoke no more and the priest returned to his seat on the stone bench with a fresh pang for the boy's sake. For his own the end was inevitable and he only longed for his trial to be over that he might the sooner come to his eternal reward.

The days dragged on till April was past and sunny May came once more to merry England. Then came the trial—a farce as usual—and condemnation.

But one thing troubled him—the fate of his sister. Had she succumbed to the hardships of that night in the hut? Had she indeed been stricken lifeless beside the bodies of her mother and the faithful Tirzah? He recalled with a shudder the night under the Franklin's roof for he had heard the mutterings of Walter in his sleep and had seen Dame Margaret peering down upon them from the stone corridor above.

For her sake he had not dared to make a sign lest his guards might wake and submit her to fresh annoyance—yet his heart had gone out to the brave woman who in spite of seeming impossibility had trained her son to be a hero. He had longed to send some one to succor his sister, while he had dreaded lest the succor prove worse than the necessity. The thought weighed him

down somewhat until he shook it resolutely from him and addressed himself to prayer.

The days passed quickly after that, yet they brought him no word of the fixing of the fatal day. He had passed through the bitterness of death and his heart was already fixed in Heaven where he longed to be.

Sometimes he yearned for news of Walter but he had come to trust in God for both his sister and his cousin and the depths of his soul were in peace.

He sat in his cell one day—it was a Sunday in June—when the sound of voices came to him from the corridor outside, and the tramping of feet. He wondered vaguely what it meant and then his heart stood still for a moment for the key turned in the lock of his cell. He deemed the fatal moment had arrived and sprang to his feet arming himself with the sign of the cross.

For a moment all was confusion—his brain reeled as two men entered bearing the semblance of a human body wrapped in a coarse blanket. They set it down upon the floor; left the lantern they had brought with them, and retired in silence. He stood rooted to the spot—this was an ordeal that he scarcely dared to face; even when a faint moan came from the blanket he had to force himself to go forward.

The cell was as dark as midnight, though it was high noon and the lantern gave but a feeble light. Reluctantly, he raised the corner of the blanket and his worst fears were realized.

The face was white and pinched with suffering

—the teeth clenched—drops of sweat stood like great beads upon the brow—the lips were blue and twitching—yet he recognized Walter. Walter the brave, the hero, the victorious! He was quite insensible. Gently—very gently—the priest forced a few drops of water between the clenched teeth—he gave a little choking sob and shook his head painfully.

“Walter, dear lad, it is I.”

The words penetrated the depths of his physical pain for the boy opened his eyes for a moment and they rested wonderingly on the priest’s face.

“Go away! hide!” he said hoarsely.

“Nay, nay, I stay with you. See—it be all over, Walter. They’ve done their worst, but they haven’t conquered you.”

“No—I—I wouldn’t tell, Father.” The words came like the gasps of pain. Father Franklin dared not touch him, he knew, by experience, the torture of a touch on a racked body. They had racked him too. But not like this—oh! not like this! and the thought never crossed his brain that it was because they reserved him for a still more hideous doom.

He knelt by the boy moistening his lips with a drop of water now and then. They were dry and shrivelled with pain. He could do nothing more save wait for a gleam of consciousness.

It came at last. The dark eyes opened wide and he looked into the priest’s face: “It—be—all—over now—Father,” he gasped and a deep thankfulness gleamed in his eyes.

"Ay, dear lad. It will not be very long now before you go. You be glad to go, Walter?"

"So glad—but I would confess—" The words came feebly now and the priest had to put his ear very close to the boy's lips to catch the murmured confession. It did not take long and when Father Franklin had given him the Sacramental Absolution the contentment in his eyes deepened.

It was unusually silent in the prison, even the passing footsteps of the gaolers seemed hushed, or it may be that the priest was too absorbed to hear them. From time to time he whispered little words of prayer and the boy repeated them feebly after him. He lay quite still for a little while longer, his face twitching with pain, but the peace in his eyes ineffable.

For a moment he seemed to rouse himself: "Give me another blessing, Father," he said, so distinctly that the priest was startled. It was like the voice of the boy comrade who had dwelt with him in the cave under the cliffs of Ethen-dene. Father Franklin bent over him as he raised his hand in benediction. It was the last grace—the wan face put on a new dignity—the eyes fixed themselves once more on the face of the priest: "Thank you, Father; you'll come to me soon," he sighed—and so fell asleep.

The priest knelt on. Hour after hour passed. He scarcely prayed. The shock—the mystery—the beauty of the boy's departure held him in a sort of trance. The lantern flickered and died out, yet he scarcely knew it for to his inward

sight the grim prison cell was filled with angels and the music of Heavenly spirits. Through all that night he knelt on and when the morning brought footsteps and the rude entrance of rough men he rose to battle for the right with renewed courage and trust.

The Governor followed the gaoler into the cell. He was accompanied by his clerk, a foxy personage with a long-pointed nose who carried writing tablets and a pen.

The Governor looked first at the body of Walter which lay at his feet. Drawing aside the covering that hid the face he listened for a sound of life, then laid his hand upon the heart that was stilled for ever. The gaoler raised the lantern that he carried so that the light fell full upon the dead boy's face. He looked young, even for his years. The delicate features had settled into a serene expression and the whiteness of the smooth skin made them resemble nothing so much as a marble mask round which the dark curls clustered like leaves about a flower. For a moment there was a silence. When the Governor spoke there was an unwonted softness in his tones that the clerk noted. He knew his man well and it was not often that sentiment touched, or the sight of suffering moved him:

"He was a gallant youth!" he said and signed to the gaoler who went to the door. At his signal two men came in clad in the garb of servants. Father Franklin started as the light of the lantern fell upon the first one's face and a glance of recognition leaped from the man's eyes to his, but

neither spoke, only as he stooped to raise the dead boy in his arms he contrived to slip a little package into the priest's hand. It was done so deftly that not even the sharp-visaged clerk noticed anything unusual.

They were about to leave the cell with their burden when Father Franklin stepped forward:

"He was my cousin," he said simply, "I would fain take leave of him." He raised the covering of the face as he spoke and looked once more on the boyish features: "Farewell, dear lad," he said tenderly, "we'll meet again anon." He replaced the blanket and stepped back: "I wait your pleasure, sir," he said to the Governor.

"Nay then, my pleasure be that you accept the Queen's pardon. Master Clerk, hand me the paper."

The man handed him a parchment to which was affixed the Great Seal of England. He passed it to the priest to read it carefully. Twice he read it—such a thing had not happened before as far as he knew and he suspected a trap.

"It be all in order?" he asked, bewildered at the sudden turn of events.

"It be all in order, sir. I have but to hand you this paper to sign."

"Ah—! suffer me to see the paper, sir."

"'Tis a matter of no moment; you have but to set your name here," volunteered the clerk.

"An it be of no moment, wherefore set my hand to it?" said the priest. "Nay, I sign no paper in the dark, sir," he retorted a trifle impatiently; his mind was keenly on the alert now.

"Nay then, Master Clerk, the request be reasonable, give him the paper to read."

The priest took the paper from the clerk's hand. A single glance sufficed him: "Nay then, sir, pray you tell Her Grace that I thank her for her clemency but that I can in no wise consent to her terms. I cannot sign this paper for 'tis clearly against my conscience."

"'Tis a pity, sir. Bethink you—be there no means of coming to this thing? Indeed the Queen hath been sorely distressed about this matter—and the boy's death under torture angered her. He was a pretty boy and spirited; she ever loves a brave spirit. 'Twas pity, yet the lad was delicate and the torture too sternly applied. They looked to make him discover certain matters, but he told nothing. A brave spirit, sir—a brave soul!"

"An would you have me, a man in years, be less in spirit than a boy? Bethink you, sir—what you ask me. Would the Queen esteem me more, think you, an I yielded to her request? By your own words I prove you wrong for you said: 'The Queen ever loves a brave spirit.'"

"Nay then, sir, 'tis a pity and I believe you'll need a brave spirit for, failing your acceptance of Her Grace's pardon, it is my painful duty to tell you that the day of your execution is fixed for to-morrow. Master Clerk, read the warrant to the prisoner."

For a second Father Franklin quailed before the recital of the grim fate that awaited him, then he bowed to the Governor:

"I would be alone, sir," he said. "My hours

be numbered. I would not lose any moment of them all, for the journey I take be somewhat long and I would fain prepare for it."

"Your request be granted, sir," replied the Governor a trifle unsteadily, for he too loved a brave spirit.

When he was gone Father Franklin bethought him of the man who had handed him the package. For a moment he was puzzled then a sudden flash of recognition came to him and he knew that it was Andrew the gardener's boy, the boy who had been tempted, and had fallen and risen again. He opened the package in the light of the lantern that the Governor had left with him—it was but a small scroll upon which was written:

"Be brave! we pray for you. E. is safe with us and we but wait for the end to go to France. C. begs your forgiveness and begs you will pray for him and us. Farewell—M.

That was all. The last burden was lifted from his soul. He could go forward to his doom with no anxiety of earth to mar his peace.

CHAPTER XIX.

WATERS OF MARA.

THE Franklin had established Dame Margaret and Etheldreda in a quiet house in Holborn. He had spent considerable time in tracing the pursuivant to London and when at last they discovered that both Father Franklin and Walter were in Newgate Prison they had hastened to that city that they might at least be near them. All Dame Margaret's efforts to communicate with her son had been unsuccessful and they did not consider it advisable for the Franklin to put himself too prominently forward seeing that he was in good standing with neither party.

He had aged considerably; the horror of that Christmas morning had left him with white hairs and the bearing of an old man. The shock of Walter's reappearance—alive and a prisoner—in the power of the man who had plotted his downfall, had broken him completely. The calm peacefulness of his dead sister-in-law and the pitiable condition of his niece had laid his pride in the dust. Even yet the memory of that furtive burial in the family vault unnerved him, and Dame Margaret had been his only sympathizer. She knew him better than any one and realized per-

haps better than any what his weakness and his temptation had been.

Terror still swayed him at times—she feared that it always would—and urged him to fly from a condition of things that he was not strong enough to face. He yielded to her pleadings after a while, it may have been her strength that forced him to the effort, but it cost him even more than she knew to make his peace. Afterward, when the decisive step was taken, he felt the beginnings of a new life slowly warming his cold heart.

The change was most noticeable in his dealings with his niece. He appeared to be anxious to defer to her on every occasion; her wishes were his law, so that he even consented to receive Andrew back into his service at her request.

The winter had tried them all severely. They had journeyed from Ethendene, staying a few days at Fordwich on their way, where they had been met by the boy, Andrew, who entreated to be allowed to join their company.

On their arrival in London the Franklin had taken a little house in Holborn, without the city, where they managed to live unobserved in the comparative quiet of suburban residences and green fields. Then it was that Andrew justified Etheldreda's intervention in his behalf. He went in and out unnoticed amongst the serving men who waited their masters' convenience at street corners, or gathered in little knots about the Courts of Justice. He came home early one day and his face was very grave,

"You have news, Andrew?" said Etheldreda, who happened to meet him coming in.

"Alack! yes, Mistress. And not of the good kind neither."

"Tell me quickly—" she urged, her face paling.

"It be Master Walter," he said.

"Ah—! yes. Tell me! Tell me quickly, Andrew."

"He was put to the question to-day, Mistress. 'Twas the third time—they say he cannot live till morning." The girl reeled and he had to put out his hand to lead her to a seat.

"Alack! poor Aunt Margaret!" she moaned. "Walter, dear lad! I trow you are too good for this sad world. But tell me, Andrew: what did they torture him for? A weakly boy. But he hath as brave a spirit as the best of them," she added earnestly.

"Ay, so they said. I heard say that the Governor was angered against them and told the Queen's Grace. There be something adoing, for there be three royal messengers come to the prison this afternoon, and one said 'twas a pardon for the priest."

"A pardon for the priest—not Harold?" There was a ring of hope in the girl's voice that cut the boy to the heart.

"Nay, Mistress; such pardons be ever granted on conditions."

"On conditions? Ah!—and no priest hath ever accepted the conditions?"

"No, Mistress."

"Then—this—this be a sign of—of the end, think you, Andrew?"

"Nay, I know not, Mistress," but his tones belied his words.

Cedric entered hastily at that moment; his brow was dark and he trod heavily.

"Andrew!" he called.

"I be here, Franklin."

He started for he had been too full of thought to see him before.

"Ah! Etheldreda, this be a bad business. I dare not tell your aunt; it seems that—"

"Ay! I heard somewhat—that Walter—" her voice failed; she laid her hand sympathetically on his sleeve, "that the worst be over for him," she finished.

"Nay, child, I heard more. It seems that the Queen hath commanded that the boy be carried to your brother's cell, that the sight of his suffering might turn him from his purpose. She be beginning to be afraid lest the people revolt against all this bloodshed and would make it seem to be the obstinacy of the priests that works their undoing against her wishes. I tried to gain access to them but failed—none knew me—or would know me."

"'Twill strengthen Harold, not weaken him," she said thoughtfully.

"I pray so," said her uncle fervently, and she was surprised at the change in him that had caused him to express a wish that echoed her own. "Will you go to Margaret," he went on, "I dare not tell her this."

She smiled at him wanly and put out her hand.

He led her to the door of his wife's chamber and left her there.

The Dame was sitting with her hands clasped in her lap. She had aged in the past few months, but though her hair was streaked with grey and the fire in her eyes had been quenched by many tears, the firmness of her face was undiminished. She looked up expectantly as Etheldreda entered the room.

"What news?" she asked quickly, for the girl's face was pale and red by turns, her breath came and went hurriedly, her grey eyes were full of trouble.

"News that be all good—to good Christians," she replied.

"To good Christians? Nay, tell me, dear. A mother's heart be but a poor weak thing, trifle not with it."

"Would you know your boy a hero?"

"Ay," she sighed, "even though heroes must suffer greatly."

"And die—?" murmured the girl.

"Walter be not dead—?" she cried, looking up into Etheldreda's face as if she would read the worst she had to tell.

"I know not so. Yet he be a hero, Aunt Margaret. Even the Queen was angered that he was so—so—"

"Tortured—?" cried Dame Margaret. "Nay, God have mercy! they did not torture the boy!" She had risen to her feet as though she must find some relief in action. Etheldreda threw her

strong young arms about her and the Dame laid her head on the girl's shoulder and wept.

"Now—tell me all," she said when she raised her head again.

"I know not much, Aunt Margaret. Only that he was put to the question—three times—and they say that he cannot live through the night."

"Poor Walter! and I cannot go to him, child. God comfort him and give us patience. Heard you aught of your brother?"

Etheldreda trembled at the question: "Ay," she replied, "nothing sure but I deem that his time be set."

Dame Margaret seated herself again and drew the girl gently down beside her: "All, I must hear all—" she said calmly, and Etheldreda told her all she knew.

It was Andrew's thought that he should claim the boy's body, and Dame Margaret eagerly seconded his attempt. The story that Walter had been conveyed to Father Franklin's cell served to comfort his mother and gave her the idea of trying to send him a message, with what success we have already seen.

While the two men went to the prison the Dame and Etheldreda remained closely within the house. They were still away when Cedric returned. He went straight to his wife.

"Where be Etheldreda?" he asked.

She looked up sharply; his face was lined and careworn, his voice trembled, his hands shook, she feared. "In her chamber, Cedric. What hath chanced?"

"Harold hath refused the Queen's pardon and the execution be set for to-morrow. The news be all about the city; already they be preparing the scaffold at Tybourne, Margaret. I dare not tell her this. My God!" he cried, and the drops of sweat stood upon his brow, testifying to his agony of remorse. He had been less moved at the news of his son's death.

"Hush, Cedric!" she said, striving to calm him, "hush! I will tell the child. 'Twill come best from me, a woman understands a woman; and Etheldreda be a fervent Catholic—her brother goes to his death a martyr for the Faith—that thought will sustain her through the ordeal—and when it be passed we will with all speed to France."

He stood with averted face for a little while; she rose and took his arm: "Nay, Cedric, 'tis by the permission of God, dear heart. Be not so downcast, indeed God can bring good out of evil."

He looked down at her wonderingly: "Then He be in truth Almighty. There be depths of infamy that make my soul dizzy, Margaret, yet I have known them. I would fain atone; yet—I be afraid, still—" he lowered his voice at the last words as though in shame. The Dame felt the thrill pass through his hand as she held it.

"Nay, Cedric, it be not good to dwell on thoughts like these. This be the time to act. Forget the past for a little, an it unman you."

He caught her to him suddenly: "I believe in

angels, Margaret, because of you," he said. "God sent you to me to save me from myself."

"Nay, Cedric, husband, my heart be sore, yet indeed I be much comforted, an this be come to pass, Walter hath not died in vain." Her voice trembled on the boy's name and she wept freely, but not bitterly.

The men came then, bearing the boy's body between them. Margaret looked up and dried her eyes as they passed her door and drew away from Cedric. He went to them and spoke for a moment with Andrew, then he returned for the Dame and together they went to their son.

He had been laid on a couch just as they had brought him from the prison. Dame Margaret knelt beside him and smoothed the dark curls from his brow. His eyes were closed and death had softened the traces of his agony. A faint smile hovered about his lips as though he would bid them not to mourn for him. She laid her cheek to his and kissed his hands that lay, as Father Franklin had placed them, crossed upon his breast.

Cedric looked once with a long mournful gaze upon his son's face. He remembered the boy's gallant stand against his own evil commands; he remembered his gentleness, his quiet answers and his silence under the blows that he had not measured in his terror lest the boy's persistence should bring him into trouble with the Queen, and then, with a cry of agony, he fell at his son's feet and besought his pardon for the bitter wrong.

Too late! Ay! it was too late, it may be, for it could never be undone—never! Yet surely the boy's spirit heard that heart-broken cry for forgiveness and presented it before the Mercy Seat of God. Margaret threw her arms about him, as though the miracle of her love could protect him from the demon of despair that threatened him. They had forgotten Etheldreda, but after a little while she stole in softly and knelt between them. Cedric moved a little to make room for her, and she looked at him and saw the misery in his eyes.

"Nay, Uncle Cedric," she said, catching his hand in hers, "Walter would not have you look thus. He be happy now—he would not come back to earth an he could. See! he be smiling at us," she went on quickly as he withdrew his hand, "'tis an honor to be the father of such as he—to have a son who died in such a cause—an honor to be permitted to share in the pain of his sacrifice," she added, her lip trembling.

"Forgive me, niece," he said, "forgive my part in Harold's death—and pray for me."

She drew his hand to that of his dead son and laid it there: "I have forgiven you, Uncle Cedric," she said quietly, "and Harold hath forgiven you too. He be suffering now—to-morrow he will be in Heaven—be sure that he will not alone forgive—but thank you then."

They knelt for a little while longer about the dead boy, then Etheldreda stole away silently and went to her chamber that she might weep a little in secret.

The following morning came hot and sultry

with a grey leaden sky that was steel blue in the West. From daybreak Etheldreda had heard the passing of little groups of people, some grave and silent, some light and noisy, who went boisterously pushing against each other and filling the air with uncouth noises.

There was a little hush for a time and then an escort of soldiers rode by at the trot. She rose from her knees then, for the hour was at hand. Dame Margaret came to her silently and threw her arms about her as though she would protect her against the terror and sorrow of that day in June. The Dame's eyes were red and swollen with weeping and her voice trembled:

"Come, child, we must be going, an we would see him pass."

They left the house quietly and threaded their way through narrow lanes, that lay between green fields. The sound of a great multitude in motion came to them from afar off. Then the call of a trumpet and the heavy tramp of armed men. Etheldreda's heart quailed for a moment, but it proved to be but a troop of soldiers who went to keep a space about the scaffold. They had reached the fatal spot now; the girl had given one glance and turned away shuddering from the sight of the gallows, and the fire and the huge chaldron of boiling pitch, and the rough uncouth men who stood about making rude jests with the soldiers and such of the crowd as joined in with them.

The horror of it all was like a sword that rent her soul from her body and she trembled so violently that Dame Margaret drew her arm pro-

tectingly through hers. There was a little stir now and then as one or another of the great officials arrived and took his place within the square of soldiers. There was another pause of expectation and then the roar of a thousand voices as the Bishop of London rode by, then silence as the crowd waited for the prisoner to set forth.

Etheldreda and the Dame had been pushed to the front by the crushing of the people and they could see far down the white dusty road that was kept clear by the soldiers who went back and forth restraining the crowd from breaking their lines.

The bell tolling from St. Sepulchre's came to them softly and distantly across the green fields and the hedges over which the honeysuckle twined about the faint pink of the dog roses. But over all the grey sky hung like a pall and now and then a gust of wind came fitfully out of the storm clouds in the West. The heat grew excessive so that many in that thronging crowd were overcome and stepped aside to make room for more resolute or stronger persons.

When at last the cloud of dust heralded the approach of the prisoner and his escort, Etheldreda stood firm. For the moment she had steeled herself to look into the face of her brother and bid him not turn back from the fray. A strange strength held her soul in invisible hands and kept her from falling insensible. The escort was at hand now—a troop of mounted men—then the sheriff and his men. There was a little gap in the long line and then Sir Thomas Sherwood rode

by haughtily at the head of his troop. Dame Margaret glanced up at Etheldreda's face, but the girl stood erect, her head high and her lips compressed. It was the critical moment. The prisoner's guards came on briskly and then the prisoner, bound to the hurdle that two horses drew along the road.

He had already suffered somewhat severely, for the road was rough and dusty, yet he looked calm and as he caught sight of his sister he smiled at her. She was too numbed to cry out and in a moment he was gone.

The crowd closed in as soon as he had passed and rushed toward the gallows. Dame Margaret looked into the girl's face again; it was set and white, but her lips moved as though she prayed. She was past hearing or seeing what was going on around her.

A sudden flash of lightning from the steel blue depths of the gathered storm surprised her into a little cry. It was followed by a crash of thunder that seemed to strike the earth and testify to the wrath of Heaven. It came at the moment that Harold Franklin was flung off the ladder, and Etheldreda shuddered and hid her face in her hands, yet she could not drag herself away. Something within her bade her stay and take her share of the suffering; bade her stay until the end—yet she had lost all sense of what was going forward and saw nothing of the frightful butchery that was going on within a few feet of where she stood. The storm increased rapidly and as

the rain began to fall heavily the crowd moved away.

It was all over then. Dame Margaret touched her on the arm:

"Come home, dear child," she said tenderly, "come home!"

"Ay, Aunt Margaret. We'll go home; methinks the very heavens weep for this sorry sight." She turned quietly and walked beside the Dame; there were comments on all sides.

"He made no speech—I counted on a speech," said one.

"Nay, 'twas a pity the fellow was so obstinate," said another. Etheldreda laid her hand on Dame Margaret's arm:

"Methinks I be but a poor sort of Christian, Aunt Margaret," she said. "I should be happy to be his sister; the sister of a martyr who is in Heaven now—yet indeed the smart be very sore, though, God knows, I would not have it otherwise."

The storm spent itself and died away. Afterward the sun shone over London City, and Holborn, and the road that led to Tybourne; and on the green fields and the hedgerows where the dog roses were twined with honeysuckle blooms.

And the night fell and the moon shone over the thickets where nightingales sang; and all the world went on its wonted way, but Dame Margaret and Etheldreda and the Franklin crept silently forth from the little house of their suffering, bearing the body of Walter with them.

They laid it to rest beside his Aunt and the

faithful gypsy who had laid down her life in their defense.

Afterward they went by night to the seashore, where they embarked for France in search of freedom from religious turmoils and the snares of wicked men.

Sir Thomas Sherwood did not live long to enjoy the possession of the Ethendene estates. He was shortly after thrown from his horse and died within a few hours. Some there were who said that he called for the ministry of a priest, and called in vain; but to this day, the country folk refuse to pass through the precincts of St. Nicholas after nightfall, alleging that the Towers of St. Nicholas are the scene of his restless search for the priest he had done to death.

EPILOGUE.

THE organ pealed in a triumphal strain that echoed through the dark arches of the Abbey Church and broke in a flood of melody against the distant walls. When it died away there was a little silence and the gentle breathing of an unseen congregation could be heard, for it was midnight—the midnight of Christmas Eve—and Mass was about to begin.

Away to the right, in a screened choir, were little lights that shone like glow worms in the distance, and here and there a worshipper on the floor of the great nave knelt beside the lantern he had brought to light him and his family to church.

In the very front of all knelt the Franklin and Dame Margaret with Etheldreda, their niece. There was a marvelous serenity on her brow that the Dame noted as she looked lovingly at her in the tiny ray of light cast by the lantern at her side. She, too, was marvelously calm and serene yet she was soon to endure another parting, for in the morning the Sisters of St. Denis had promised to receive Etheldreda into their midst. But for the moment she knelt beside her aunt with her heart more in Heaven with her dear ones there than upon earth.

Five years had passed since her brother's death. Five years of pain and hardship for the most part, yet in the end peace had come to them, and better times, for Cedric had succeeded in obtaining an appointment in the army of Henry of Navarre that enabled him to provide for the necessities of his family.

But Etheldreda had turned her thoughts to Heaven, or rather she could not turn them away from it; she felt that the blood of her father and brother, and the tears and sufferings of her mother had in a sense consecrated her to a higher service and a nobler life. Now that Dame Margaret needed her no longer, she had besought the Sisters of St. Denis to receive her into their community and the festival of Christmas had been appointed for her entrance into religion.

The Sisters, some of whom had known her mother in her youth, were willing and anxious to receive one who had already suffered so much for conscience sake. So Etheldreda knelt with her aunt for the last time in the peaceful shadow of the sanctuary that was so shortly to become her refuge and her home until the bright day of eternity should see her once more united with her family.

The Mass was ended, yet they still knelt awhile unwilling to disturb the girl's prayer. Andrew came at length and touched Cedric respectfully on the arm:

"They would close the Church, Franklin," he said softly.

Etheldreda heard the whispered word and rose

to go with one last glance toward the screened choir where the nuns already began to chant the office of Prime. Another day and she would be with them, she thought, as she turned with a happy sigh to follow Dame Margaret.

The years passed again. Cedric Franklin had fallen in battle beside his servant Andrew, covered with wounds and honor and Dame Margaret was alone in the world.

She had done her work. She had upheld the fainting courage of Cedric; had been the guiding spirit of his repentance; the revelation to him of that strength which is divine. Now she in her turn would end her days in the peaceful Abbey.

Another Christmas night brings her to the gates. This time she is alone—poor—unknown—she begs a shelter for the sake of the infant Christ and His Blessed Mother. The Guest Mistress conducts her to the guest house and serves her humbly, with water for her feet and warm clothing. Her eyes are downcast, she goes serenely about the duties of her office, yet no word betrays her to the feeble stranger who has claimed the Abbey's hospitality.

The Midnight Mass sees the stranger wrapped in prayer, the Sisters cannot help but notice her devotion, for it is so like an angel's, or what they imagine an angel's must be.

After the Morning Mass the Guest Mistress seeks out the Abbess and tells her of the beggar of the night. She starts up quickly:

"Come Sister, and bid her welcome," she says, "indeed we be honored to have her with us."

A few years longer she lingered, a peaceful figure amongst the pensioners of the Abbey, and when at last she died, full of years and merits, it was the Abbess who closed her eyes, and the Abbess was—Etheldreda.

